

news

Burger blamed over BSE death

CHARLES ARTHUR
Science Editor

A coroner opened up a legal minefield yesterday by ruling that beef products contaminated with "mad-cow disease" (BSE) caused the death of a young man from the new strain of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD).

Geoffrey Burt, coroner for North Durham, returned a verdict of misadventure on Peter Hall, 20, who died in February of CJD despite being a vegetarian since 1992. Mr Burt said

that on the "balance of probabilities" something like a beefburger eaten before 1990 caused the disease.

The verdict was significant because it did not rule the disease to be "natural causes", as it would be in its normal form, which usually affects people over 60. Instead, Mr Burt told the hearing, in Durham, that he felt misadventure was the appropriate verdict because the former student's death came about "through an outside course".

The decision leaves open the

question of whether Hall's parents could sue the manufacturers of any foods, or the Government, for failing to take sufficient action to keep the BSE agent out of the food chain.

After the hearing, his parents said they were "very pleased" with the outcome but it was "far too early" to consider pressing for compensation. Derek Hall said: "This has been a step in the right direction and is more ammunition to get things moving for a public inquiry." His wife, Frances, said: "We want the

Government to recognise that this has been a problem for a lot of years and should have been dealt with much earlier. Our son died because of their mistakes."

However, James Ironside, of the CJD Surveillance Unit in Edinburgh, said: "This doesn't constitute proof of a link. It is a hypothesis, based on the epidemiological evidence. We need results from other experiments before we can definitely say that one causes the other."

He also disclosed that the number of suspected victims of the new CJD is slowly growing,

according to figures from the unit. Five more suspected cases are under review, including a teenage girl in Scotland. There have been 12 cases in Britain in the past two years, all the victims aged under 42.

Hall, who was from Chester-le-Street, County Durham, was one of the 12 cases. He had been vegetarian since he was 16 but his father said that before that time he had often taken a quick beefburger snack on coming home from school. And more often than not they had brisket on Sunday.

Mr Burt said: "I am satisfied that it is more likely than not that Peter contracted this disease prior to 1990 through eating some form of contaminated beef product, such as a beefburger."

A Health Department spokesman said that a coroner's opinion did not constitute scientific fact.

"The verdict is misadventure. It's a contribution to the debate and you now know the coroner's opinion but it doesn't actually change anything material here."

Bards of Wales strike blow for language

TONY HEATH

Welsh poets who claim the BBC is undermining the purity of the ancient language are going on strike.

The bards are setting their sights on the Cardiff-based station Radio Cymru – in particular the long-running *Twmw y Beirdd* (Cockpit of the Bards) programme which challenges contestants to compose poems in strict metre.

The programme which goes out twice a week has a successful track record extending over 15 years and, the BBC says, it will continue with or without the critics. The bards complain that the station, a major player in Wales's cultural life, is abandoning the old values of strict grammar and pronunciation to make way for programmes aimed at younger audiences.

They insist that Radio Cymru, which now includes English rock and pop – and the occasional word in another language – must be an all-Welsh service, for the 500,000 fluent speakers among Wales' 2.6 million inhabitants.

One of the senior bards, Myrddin ap Dafydd, who owns a bookshop at Llanwrst in the Conwy Valley, said: "The BBC is undermining the reasons for the station's existence."

Geraint Talfan Davies, BBC controller in Wales and a fluent Welsh speaker, was unworried by the threat of industrial action. "This is clearly a special moment in industrial history. It needs to be commemorated in a special radio ode which we would be happy to commission."

The battle between purists and the populists was joined yesterday by Agenda, an independent company that supplies a mighty magazine programme to the Welsh Fourth TV Channel. Its editor, Rhodri Williams, ensures that popular Welsh personalities who cannot communicate in the language still get an airing. He said: "It is essential to have policies that include output for people who don't speak Welsh very well."

Tories under fire: Model who posed for photo hits out at 'dirty tricks' campaign



Focus of attention: A close-up of Scott Woods's eyes yesterday, turned upside down to mimic the campaign advertisement. Photograph: Edward Webb

Devil advert gets another one in the eye

MICHAEL STREETER

The Tory decision to demonise Tony Blair continues to haunt the party, with the actor whose eyes were used to represent the devil in the Labour leader complaining yesterday that he did not approve of "dirty tricks" campaign.

Scott Woods, a model and actor, said yesterday he would have turned down the job had he known the full content of the advertisements. His comments follow the announcement by the Advertising Standards Authority that it was investigating complaints about the campaign.

Mr Woods, 42, of Hackney, east London, said: "I knew the image was going to be used in



No to the eyes: Tory advert

es on me to make me look even more of a serial killer."

The actor, who was chosen from a list of models on the

books of the Ugly Enterprises model agency, admits he is a Blair supporter but confesses he used to vote for Margaret Thatcher. "I think Tony Blair is trying to change things and I admire him for that."

Although open to the charge of self-publicity in coming forward, Mr Woods, who only took up acting a year ago and is thought to have been paid around £200 for the work, did not tell his agent or model agency of yesterday's informal press conference. His motive, he said, was fear of exposure by a newspaper that was on his trail.

Steve Hilton, of M&C Saatchi, which devised the campaign, said that at the time Mr Woods did the photographs and a related video there were no plans to use the Blair newspaper advertisements, which were a response to the Clare Short interview in the *New Statesman*.

Ministers 'contemptuous' of checks on EU

ANTHONY BEVINS
Political Editor

Westminster's first and most vital check on Brussels law-making is regularly treated with contempt by British ministers and their departments.

Government undertakings and Commons resolutions lay down a strict procedure, under which ministers are generally not allowed to agree to Brussels directives or regulations until they have been cleared by a formal Westminster scrutiny procedure.

Under that process, the all-party European Legislation Committee – probably the most streamlined and professional operation in the Palace of Westminster – plays a vital, democratic role on behalf of Parliament.

But it is now regularly being

subjected to what it generously calls "lapses". Whatever the cause of the "difficulties", democracy is being short-circuited.

Listing the main problems it faces with Whitehall, the committee cites:

■ Failure to secure Westminster scrutiny clearance before ministers reach final Brussels agreement – legislative decision. "On some occasions ministers have not only failed to secure scrutiny clearance, they have failed to tell us about it until some weeks later, or not at all;

■ Late deposit of documents. "In one case, seven weeks after the proposal had been agreed", or enacted in Brussels;

■ Late submission of ministerial explanatory memorandums, which should have been delivered within 10 working days of the Brussels proposal arriv-

ing in London: "In the worst cases, five weeks and eight weeks after the documents had been discussed in the Council."

So ministers who are talking in Brussels do not have the time or inclination to fulfil fundamental democratic obligations to their own national Parliament:

■ Late provision of information formally requested by the select committee in reports or in letters to ministers. "A number of delays of three months or more, in the worst case, fourteen months."

According to the committee, each of those categories "represents breaches of government undertakings or a

Resolution of the House." But that democratic felony is compounded by the bungling incompetence – or worse – of Whitehall departments who apparently feel that they do not even have to perform the most basic tasks, like correctly addressing letters, or enclosing documents that are said to be enclosed.

Departments, and particularly ministers' Private Offices, do not seem able to get documents to us with any degree of reliability.

The basic requirement is that all communications of any sort should come to our offices, where they can be registered and copied, briefing prepared,

and then circulated in reasonable time for Members to study them before their weekly scrutiny meeting.

"Given the quantity of documents we deal with every week, this operation is always close to the margin."

"It becomes impossible if we do not receive explanatory memorandums and ministerial and other correspondence by the quickest possible means."

But in spite of the clearest possible Whitehall instructions – and repeated reminders from the Cabinet Office – letters are still being sent to Jimmy Hood, the Labour committee chairman, at the Commons, with no indication that they contain urgent correspondence for his committee.

When he is in his Clydesdale constituency, the Commons post office automatically redi-

rects all his mail to Scotland – completely bypassing the select committee machine.

But the insult does not end. Ministers' letters are frequently sent by second class post, sometimes even when a minister is asking us for urgent scrutiny clearance on a document.

Other regular problems include missing enclosures, letters for us addressed to the House of Lords, to other select committees, to non-existent committees, and so on."

Last year, the committee warned ministers that it would consider a boycott of some European proposals if Brussels continued to expect Westminster scrutiny to be carried out "blind" – without the texts of the documents, regulations and directives that were on the brink of enactment by ministers.

SIGNIFICANT SHORTS

The five boys on the French school trip on which the schoolgirl Caroline Dickinson was murdered were yesterday taken to a police station to give DNA samples, said a source close to the investigation. The youngsters arrived in three unmarked vehicles. Nearly two hours later, they were rushed away in a white unmarked Range Rover.

The boys were in a 45-strong party of pupils and teachers from Launceston community college on a week-long trip to Brittany when the tragedy happened on 18 July. Caroline, 13, from Launceston, was raped and suffocated in a tiny dormitory in a hotel in the town of Pleine-Fougeres. A Devon and Cornwall police source has said the boys were being treated as witnesses, not suspects. All the children on the trip will now be reinterviewed.

Industrial unrest in the rail network is set to spread to the flagship Gatwick Express line and other key companies in disputes over productivity and breaks during working periods. Employees at some eight companies are already planning 24-hour strikes on Friday and Tuesday, but ballots on strikes are now taking place at a dozen more operators.

The Friday and Tuesday stoppages, involving catering staff, conductors and ticket collectors, are set to affect Central Trains, North West Regional, South Wales and West, Merseyrail Electrics, North London Railways, Regional Railways North East, Cross-Country and ScotRail. Walkouts are also planned on 29 August and 12 September at other companies: South West Trains, Anglia Railway, Cardiff Railway, Gatwick Express, Great Eastern, London Tilbury and Southend, Inter-City West Coast, Midland Mainline and Island Line, Thames, East Coast Main Line and Great Western. *Barrie Clement*

The potential eviction of homeless asylum seekers from temporary accommodation was put on hold last night after High Court action by Shelter and the Refugee Council. Government lawyers told the court they were urgently consulting the housing minister David Currie on the intentions behind part of the Asylum and Immigration Act after the two charities argued that the Government was attempting to implement it retrospectively. The Department of the Environment said it had "no view" on whether councils should act immediately as Shelter accused ministers of "astounding incompetence" in failing to issue guidance under the Act. *Nicholas Timmins*

The solicitor representing the man accused of stabbing a young vicar to death in his churchyard told a court yesterday that he was concerned about the large amount of publicity the case had attracted. Julian Linskell told Liverpool Magistrates' Court that he was concerned about whether Terence Storey, 31, of Speke, Liverpool, would get a fair trial in the city. Reporting restrictions were lifted after an application by Mr Linskell when Mr Storey appeared charged with murdering the 32-year-old clergyman Christopher Gray eight days ago at St Margaret's Church, Anfield. Mr Storey was remanded in custody until September 16.

Police seized a 2kg rhino horn worth £15,000 after a raid on a commercial premises and are now questioning a man over the discovery. Area wildlife officers from the Metropolitan Police and the Environmental Investigation Agency searched the premises, in west London, yesterday and seized the tusk, which is 16-20 inches long. The search was part of Operation Charn, a continuing investigation into the illegal trade and importation of endangered species.

A charity yesterday called on the Pope to condemn animal cruelty in Catholic celebrations. The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) is asking supporters to send postcards of abused animals to the Pontiff, urging him to oppose the cruelty meted out at Spanish and Latin American fiestas. The postcards of bleeding, tethered and tormented bulls include one of a bull with lit Catherine wheels on his horns.

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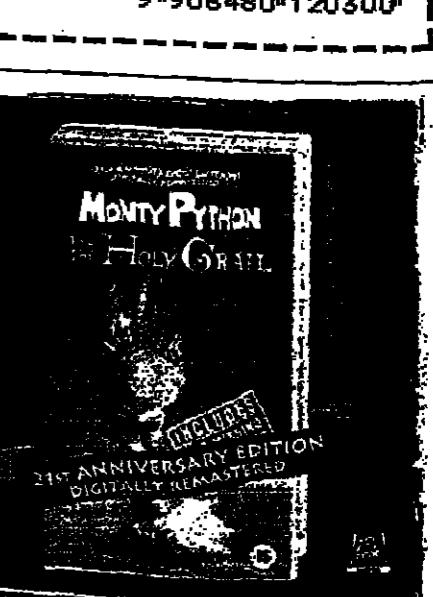
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The Royal Family is debating a new role, but just who will pay the piper – and call the tune?

Debate finds MPs at a loss

It's one of the last great political taboos. Politicians find debating the future of the Royal Family about as comfortable as discussing BSE over Sunday lunch.

The Labour Party in particular considers it a very touchy subject. When prospective parliamentary candidate Paul Richards recently published his Fabian pamphlet – gently suggesting referendums on keeping the Monarchy – you could almost hear the sound of falling furniture as Labour spin doctors ran to their phones to distance the party from such heretical views.

Frontbenchers have fared little better. The shadow Secretary of State for Wales, Ron Davies, was forced to apologise for doing to suggest that Prince Charles may not be entirely fit to be king.

Even leadership favourite Mo Mowlam was subjected to reverse spin-doctoring two years ago when she proposed a purpose-built "People's Palace" for the Royals, leaving Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace to the nation. And Jack Straw was criticised in the House by the normally mild-mannered Stephen Dorrell for posing it a Scandinavian-style monarchy.

Tony Blair has gone out of his way to make it clear that even a constitutionally reforming Labour Party perceives a central role for the Queen.

The political wisdom among Labour ranks, largely unchallenged, is that the "ordinary" people love the Royals and even hinting that the expense, embarrassment and anachronism of the House of Windsor may be worth reforming is electoral suicide.

Labour backbencher Lynn Jones, who would like to see a referendum on the role of the monarchy at the end of the Queen's reign, feels politicians are too cautious. "It is amazing that we don't discuss this issue," she says. "The politicians are behind the public on this – it's not something people are unwilling to discuss."

Indeed, like Dr Jones, Rotherham's Labour MP, Denis MacShane, sees a role for a streamlined monarchy which could still carry out formal and ceremonial functions. "I would much rather someone like Princess Anne coming up here to open a new Sunday school. In other countries you'd get some plonker of an MP doing it."

Michael Streeter



Board meeting: The 'Way Forward Group' (from left) Sir Richard Aylard, Prince Charles, Prince Philip, the Queen, and Sir Robert Fellowes

Photomontage: Jonathan Anstee

Rulers with pedal power

Since Britain stumbled on the odd notion of a ruler without power constitutional monarchy has become, alongside soccer and cricket, one of our more successful exports. In fact, the damned foreigners liked the idea so much that they have become better at it than ourselves (like soccer and cricket).

Ten years ago, the British monarchy was the most popular and least controversial in the world. Now, it seems, others have managed a smoother transition to the post-deferential era.

There have been non-British royal scandals aplenty. A couple of years ago, a Norwegian princess was cited in a divorce case by a shop assistant from Ellerslie Port. But royal peccadilloes elsewhere have not had a devastating effect on the institution of monarchy.

There may be two reasons for this. The British royals make global news in a way most of the other royals can't. Secondly, the other royal families (Japan's apart) sloughed off their quasi-divine status years ago. Human foibles were no great shock to their largely indifferent subjects. The British, by contrast, have had a rapid and uncomfortable descent; from reverence to near-mockery.

The Windsors evidently detect the notion that the-called "bicycling royals" of Europe got it right and they got it wrong. Two years ago, Prince Charles splutteringly told the *Mall on Sunday* that the Scandinavian royals, in particular, are "grander, more pompous, more hard to approach than we are".

Grander? Most of the other royal families are less expensive to maintain than ours, although not cheap and always more expensive than a president.

The cost of the Dutch throne, probably the most expensive on the Continent, is estimated at £37m annually, compared to £10m for ours (hidden extras included). The fluffy count is also instructive. The British Royal Household is 400, Norway's 120, Sweden's 70 and Denmark's a dozen.

More pompous and harder to approach? The Japanese certainly; the Europeans hardly. Queen Margrethe of Denmark has fortnightly audiences with members of the public. The Belgian royal family is especially touchy-feely; they were out and about hugging victims of accidents long before the Princess of Wales became the Queen of Hearts.

John Lichfield



Steve Boggan

caption

E. Windsor & Sons?

Church thinks it's free already



Defender of the Faith: Henry VIII bleed his title. Prince Charles might after it

The other main links in establishment are that the Prime Minister appoints diocesan bishops from a short-list prepared by a committee of church politicians and civil servants and that 24 of these bishops sit in the House of Lords. The Prime Minister also chooses senior cathedral clergy. The church's governing body, the General Synod, is the only body outside Parliament which can make English law. Parliament must approve the laws that the General Synod passes, but it cannot modify them.

A recent row over the control of the church's assets has shown clearly that the Church of England believes that it is already free from state control in all but name. The social security select committee of the House of Commons has objected to a church plan to transfer control of the income from the church's £3bn assets from the Church Commissioners, who are formally answerable to Parliament, to the General Synod, which is not. It is clear from the synod's response that it cannot accept state control of the church as anything more than a distant principle.

Andrew Brown

So, would the monarch look radically different? Lord Blake, the Conservative historian, who has offered advice in the past at the request of the Queen – though not in this forum – thinks not. "To all intents and purposes, most people would see no difference," he said.

Some observers believe the sex and religious discrimination reforms will endear the Royal Family to many who had begun to lose faith in it. But they also feel the financial changes display a realisation within the royal that the writing is on the wall.

It may be that the Queen feels the 21st century will end with Britain as a republic. If so, perhaps she considers the time is ripe to reclaim the family silver.

John Lichfield

Rewriting history with big sister in charge



of Henry II, instead of King Richard I, "would have avoided the whole nonsense with Richard the Lion Heart". Richard was a "dreamer" who "cared more for crusades than governing his own country", but it is hard to say whether his sister would have been better, since little is known of her.

If the eldest child of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Edward VII's sister Princess Victoria, "had become sovereign and married the Emperor Frederick of Germany, you could make a fairly good argument that it would have averted the First and Second World Wars," said Mr Brooks-Baker.

And if she had not married the Emperor, they would not have created Kaiser Wilhelm, "certainly the most destructive person in the first half of the 20th century", he added.

Finally, what would have happened had George III's sister Augusta, ruled the country? "There's a good chance that Great Britain would not have lost the American colonies," Mr Brooks-Baker said. "Obviously Great Britain would be a much richer, more powerful country today."

Claire Gamer

that time and probably would have avoided [later] problems." Her brother might even have escaped his unfortunate decapitation. Elizabeth, incidentally, was named the "Queen of Hearts" for her "winning demeanour".

And if Henry VIII had been beaten to the throne by his older sister Margaret? "We would have kept up with her brother on the spouse front."

A Queen Matilda, daughter

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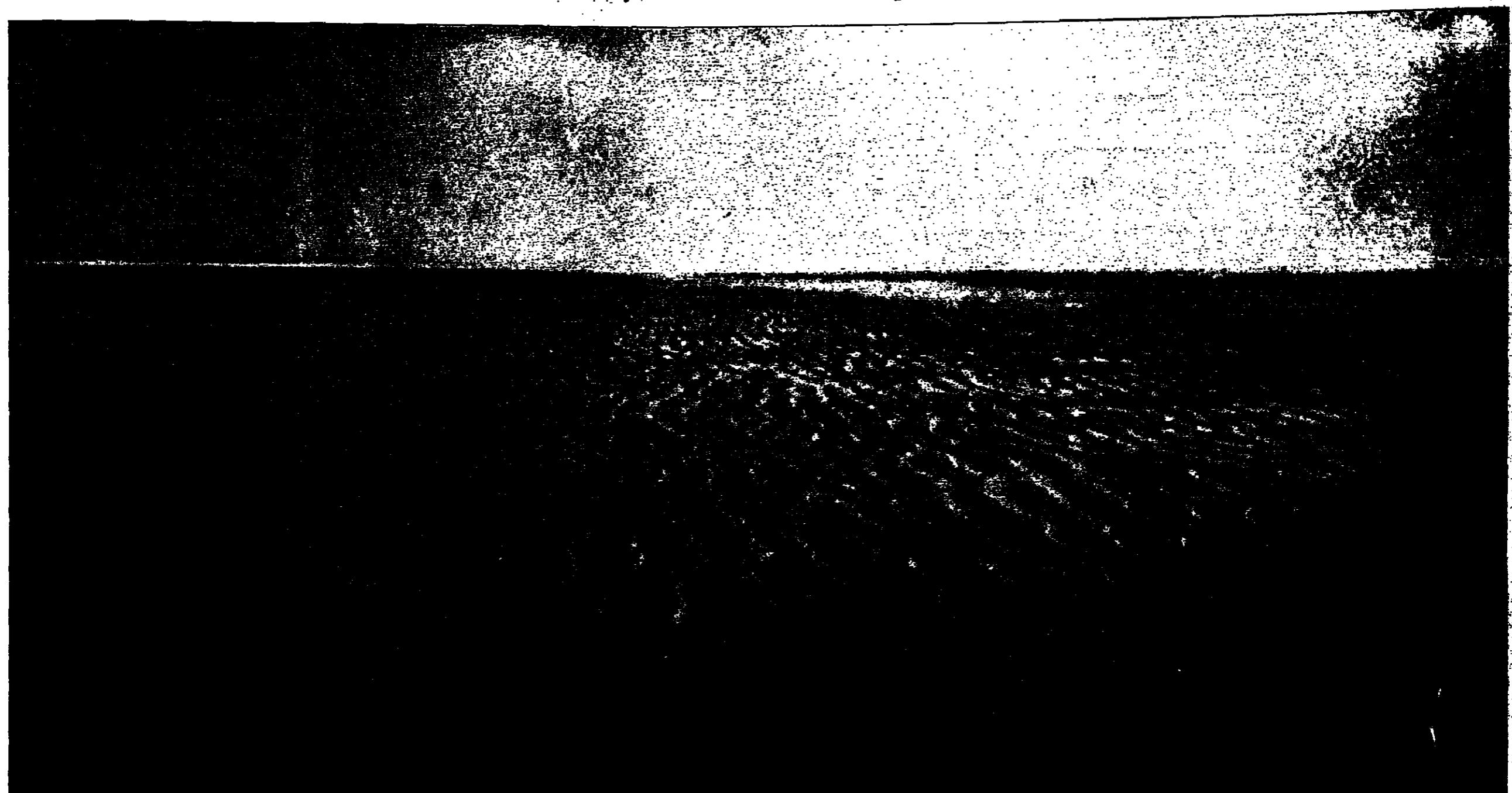
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news

The beach is deserted, but a desperate hunt continues



Dangerous playground: The beach at Holme in Norfolk yesterday. Jodie and Tom Loughlin were last seen running towards the sea, which is notorious in the area for the unpredictability of the tide

Photograph: Simon Hadley/Assignments

The beach at Holme in Norfolk was eerily deserted of families yesterday, as police continued the search for two children who apparently disappeared after splashing in the sea at the start of their summer holiday.

Jodie Loughlin, six, and her brother Tom, four, were last seen by their parents running through crowds of families towards the waves on Sunday evening as the tide came in. They disappeared from their

Charlie Bain reports on the fruitless search for two small children thought to have walked into the surf

parents' sight within minutes.

As dusk fell last night, police continued to comb the four-mile area of coast near Hunstanton, joined by a firemen, coastguards, mountain rescue experts and volunteers. But they found no sign of the children, who cannot swim, and fears grew that they had been swept out to sea.

Their parents, Kevin

Loughlin and Lynette Thornton, both 37, from south London, were fighting to come to terms with what had happened.

Superintendent John Hale, who is co-ordinating the search, said there was no indication that the children had been abducted. The search was to be resumed at sunrise today.

The children's parents have

been absolutely amazed," Supt Hale said. "Everything must have gone through their minds, I am sure. But they have nothing to reproach themselves for. Children get separated from their parents on beaches all the time. We know that it only takes a minute."

The family had arrived for a week's holiday in Norfolk on

Saturday. Mr Loughlin, a computer consultant, was the last known person to have seen the children and was among searchers who scoured beaches, dunes and woodland for six hours on Sunday night.

One woman holidaymaker, from Cambridgeshire, reported seeing two children who fitted the description of Jodie and

Tom playing alone in the surf at around 6.30pm on Sunday, about a mile from where they were last seen. Police are also examining a private video of the scene on the beach on Sunday.

The beach at Holme was particularly busy at the weekend because Hunstanton was celebrating its 150th anniversary. Thousands of families visited

the resort, which is famous for its golf course, sandy beaches, coastal resorts and nature reserves.

But Holme is also notorious for its unpredictable waters and uneven sands which has led to swimmers being caught out by the incoming tide.

The incident is the second tragedy involving holidaymak-

ers there in the past two years. An eight-year-old boy from Leicester was buried alive in a sand dune in the resort.

The body of a missing eight-year-old boy was found on a beach near Skegness, Lincolnshire, yesterday after a three-hour search by 100 volunteers joined police, coastguards and lifeguard crews in a search. A police spokesman said there were no suspicious circumstances.

Virus triggers recall of blood products

GLENDA COOPER

Blood products which are used to treat haemophiliacs and burns victims were recalled yesterday after a hepatitis virus was found in the plasma from which they are made.

A donor in a "window" period - when antibodies do not show up in the blood - or a failure in the screening process were the most likely causes of contamination of the plasma pool with traces of the hepatitis C virus.

The National Blood Authority said that recalling the products was precautionary and assured patients that the four batches of factor VIII and albumin would pose no risk to them. The blood products would have gone through viral inactivation processes to make them safe even if they did contain a virus, the NBA said.

Factor VIII is given to haemophiliacs and albumin is used to treat people with burns and shock. The batches, sent out in June and July, contained about 2,000 bottles of factor VIII and 11,500 of albumin.

The problem was revealed by a new extra-sensitive test known as the PCR (polymerase chain reaction), required under European rules for the manufacture of certain types of blood product. Minute traces of hepatitis C were found in the plasma pool from which the products were being made by Bio Products Laboratory (BPL), which is part of the NBA.

The test was carried out on a sample of the plasma that was to be used to make immunoglobulin - an immune system booster used to fight hepatitis and one of the vaccinations commonly given to travellers. The plasma pool had

already been used to manufacture factor VIII and albumin.

A spokeswoman for the NBA said: "We consulted the Department of Health and felt in the public interest that this was the right thing to do. If we find any trace of a virus then we don't use the product."

She stressed that there was no chance of the virus posing a health risk. Factor VIII and albumin were processed to knock out any viruses they might contain before they were given to patients, she said. "Patients who have used the products need have no concern about their safety."

She said that the virus could have made its way into the plasma pool if one of the donors had been in a "window" period or if there had been a fault in one of the tests. She said that a full investigation would be carried out to find out how this could have happened.

Gabrielle Page, spokeswoman for the hepatitis C support group, said that the "fragmentation" of the blood service made it easier for mistakes to happen. "Whereas it used to be a body, non-profit making and existing for itself, now that it has to sell off its products and has to become diversified it has changed."

BPL was yesterday contacting its customers asking them to return the blood products, which would be destroyed. The plasma pool would not be used to make any more products.

Hepatitis C is a "silent" disease which may not produce symptoms for 20 years. It was discovered only in 1989 and, without treatment, 25 to 50 per cent of patients develop scarring of the liver and a proportion of those will have liver failure and some will develop liver cancer.

The potentially harmful levels will increase pressure for action to curb traffic in cities when the Government publishes its draft National Air Quality Strategy today.

More ammunition for environmental campaigners was provided by researchers for the British Lung Foundation who said high levels of summer ozone may be damaging the lungs of even healthy individuals.

The researchers, based at Southampton General Hospital, found that the airways of healthy people exposed to ozone pollution became inflamed. The findings suggested people could protect themselves from ozone with antioxidant vitamins like A, C and E.

The DoE air quality forecast for most parts of England was given as "poor" yesterday, though in the event the critical level was only triggered in North Yorkshire.

Nottingham was the hottest spot yesterday, reaching 31.4C. Holidaymakers leaving Heathrow for the Mediterranean were forsaking a baking 31C for a cooler 27C at noon in Nice.

Though the temperature fell short of this year's hottest - 33.1C in Jersey on 22 July and 32.9 at Gravesend on 7 June - the M25 started to melt around junction three, where it meets the M20 in Kent.

But the mini-heatwave is almost over. Showers, maybe thunderstorms, are on the way.

Profits bonanza, page 17.

Filthy hot snap has Britons wheezing

STEPHEN GOODWIN

Air quality in England was at or near the health-warning point yesterday as Mediterranean temperatures combined with exhaust emissions and other pollutants.

Friends of the Earth said Britain was "choking in the worst smog of the summer" but the Department of the Environment judged there was no need to repeat its special notice of six weeks ago, mainly directed at motorists and sufferers from asthma and other problems.

Nitrous oxide pollution was described as "poor" in London - carrying a warning to vulnerable people to avoid strenuous activity - and was nearly as bad in other parts of central and eastern England.

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Profits bonanza, page 17.

Man of humanity: Jew had gift of compassion

Holocaust survivor Rabbi Gryn dies

Andrew Brown
Religious Affairs Correspondent

Rabbi Hugo Gryn, who died yesterday aged 66, was one of the last survivors of the Holocaust to play a role in public life.

Only about 100,000 Jews emerged alive from the camps in 1945; yet some of the survivors brought an extraordinary sweetness, as Hugo did.

He was born in the Carpathian mountains, emerged from Auschwitz at the age of 15, with his father who died almost immediately after they were liberated. After working as a rabbi in New York and Bombay, he became rabbi of the West London synagogue in Mayfair, the largest and most fashionable Reform Jewish synagogue in England; and in his work on Radio 4's *The Moral Maze* he became one of the most respected religious broadcasters in the country.

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Rabbi Gryn's friend and colleague, Rabbi Albert Friedlander, said yesterday that for many of the camp survivors, "it was a very lonely existence, because they were pushed away by the society in which they lived".

The researchers, based at Southampton General Hospital,

found that the airways of healthy people exposed to ozone pollution became inflamed. The findings suggested people could protect themselves from ozone with antioxidant vitamins like A, C and E.

The DoE air quality forecast for most parts of England was given as "poor" yesterday, though in the event the critical level was only triggered in North Yorkshire.

Nottingham was the hottest spot yesterday, reaching 31.4C. Holidaymakers leaving Heathrow for the Mediterranean were forsaking a baking 31C for a cooler 27C at noon in Nice.

Though the temperature fell short of this year's hottest - 33.1C in Jersey on 22 July and 32.9 at Gravesend on 7 June - the M25 started to melt around junction three, where it meets the M20 in Kent.

But the mini-heatwave is almost over. Showers, maybe thunderstorms, are on the way.

Profits bonanza, page 17.

did not want to know. Elie Wiesel, a camp survivor and writer who won the Nobel peace prize, said that many years what would hurt most was that he was not believed.

A disproportionate number of notable camp survivors were writers, partly because the injunction to write and to record was passed down through the camps; partly because writing was a skill which interfered very little with the work of survival. Most of the musicians and artists who entered the camps seem to have perished there.

"Hugo was one of the rare people who somehow seemed to rise beyond it," Evelyn Friedlander said. "People who have suffered are much more able to deal with reconciliation, say survivors in some ways often found it easier to forgive than did others of their generation."

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The Government yesterday rejected a call from doctors to make the disconnection of water supplies illegal because of the risk to public health.

Cutting off water to homes could lead to the spread of diseases such as dysentery and hepatitis A, the British Medical Association warned.

The Department of Health said there was no evidence of a danger to health. A spokesman said: "We have never been able to establish any direct relationship between water disconnection and the spread of communicable diseases in the UK."

But the mini-heatwave is almost over. Showers, maybe thunderstorms, are on the way.

The company with the largest number of disconnections last

year, Thames Water, defended its right to cut off persistent non-payers. A spokeswoman for the company, which made 1,047 disconnections in 1995-96, said cutting off supplies remained a last resort, but added: "We have to distinguish between those people who can't pay and those who won't pay."

In Scotland and Northern Ireland disconnections are already illegal, forcing companies to recover debts without cutting water. The BMA argues there is no reason why the same policy should not be adopted in England, where disconnections have been allowed since 1945.

According to the latest report from the water watchdog,

Argos sails into top league

Catalogue retailer has revolutionised the high street, writes Glenda Cooper

own purchase and order it from the storerooms.

The idea behind Argos came from America and caught the eye of Richard Timpson, who had introduced Green Shield stamps in Britain in the early Seventies. He launched the first 17 Argos stores from a London hotel, with much razzmatazz (18 dancers and specially written songs) on 17 July 1973. Sales to

said Janet Hildreth, group public relations manager. "We have shoppers from every single social group."

Argos is a company with quite a long history, said George Wallace, chief executive of Management Horizons, specialists in retail consultancy. "I think initially it may have been seen as a little bit downmarket. But my view is that it is one of those institutions in retailing which goes across the social and income groups. I think it has really come of age."

For Richard Perkins, senior retail analyst at Verdict, the success of Argos in recent years reflects the 1990s zeitgeist. And, despite the feelgood factor returning, there is as yet no rush back to the conspicuous consumerism of the Eighties.

"Even though we are going through a consumer upturn, people still respond carefully to the combination of value for money, quality and guaranteed brand names," he said. "At the end of the day, it comes down to the right products at the right price."

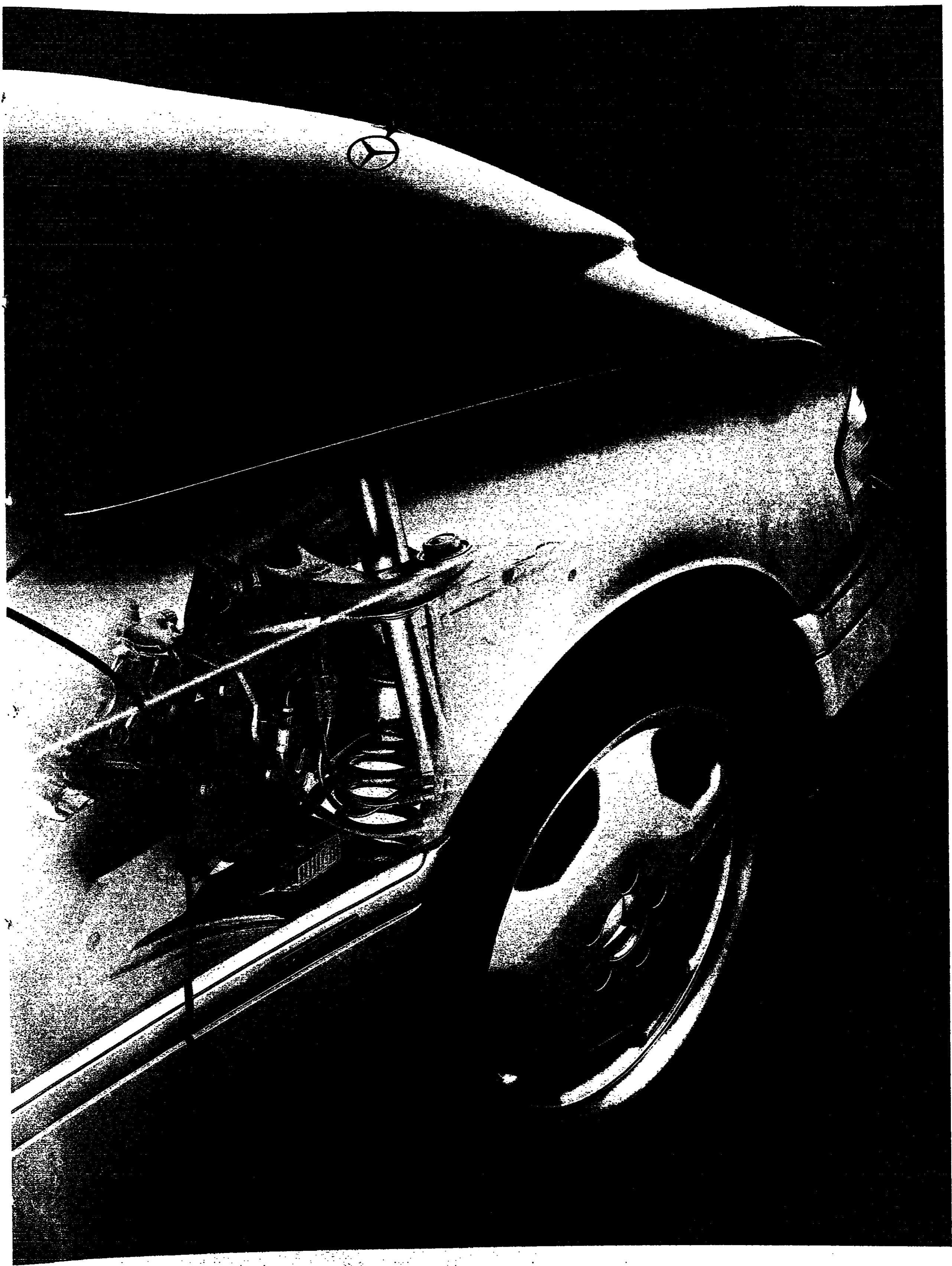
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news

Blair's promises fail to soften Northern grit

It takes a drive down a cobbled street into a scene that could have been painted by Lowry to reach the turn-of-the-century, red brick factory of James Halstead Ltd, a Bury-based manufacturer of vinyl flooring. It would be hard to feel more removed from the corridors of Westminster than this.

But it is the reactions of the managers running businesses like these that will determine whether Labour's policies for manufacturing will work, after a period that has seen jobs in the sector almost halve since 1979 and recent investment run in real terms at below the level achieved then.

The three key planks of the policy – a stable economy, the

encouragement of long-term investment and improved skills – are uncontroversial. The specific twists – changing the structure of capital gains tax, for example – are more so.

Yet on the whole, businesses do not object to these Labour priorities. Nor, however, do they think these are things a Labour government could deliver, or at least deliver any better, than the Tories.

Roy Murphy, James Halstead's managing director, is not especially hostile to Labour. He

just thinks, like many businessmen, that the best thing government can do for industry is precisely nothing. "The only thing that has affected my investment decisions is whether we had a good business case. Is it necessary and is there a payback?" he says.

Low inflation and interest rates are crucial, he says. It is a widely-shared opinion. A few miles from Halstead's lies Chadwicks, a Swedish-owned manufacturer of food packaging. Its managing director,



Streetwise: The cobbled path to James Halstead in Bury. Since 1979 manufacturing jobs in the region have halved. Photograph: Phil Noble/Newsbeam

Stephen Crow, underlines that

a £4m piece of equipment can take well over two years to deliver and install. "German businesses have been able to predict what interest rates and inflation

would be in four years' time. For the first time in my working life there is a culture of stable inflation in this country. It makes long-term investment much more viable." But he trusts the

Conservatives more than Labour to deliver that. "I'm sure I could live with Tony Blair if he's as good as his word. But I don't believe he can control his left wing."

There is surprisingly little enthusiasm for the temporary extra capital allowances which Gordon Brown has proposed – even at P&E a high-tech computer services company a few miles north of Bury which represents the new face of Northwest business. But John Atkin, its finance director says his firm's major overhead is the continuous training needed to keep pace with that change.

"We have to train all the time, and if the Government is prepared to subsidise us for it, that's great. We'd welcome more encouragement for training." He, however, is suspicious of Labour's desire to implement the EU Social Chapter – a distrust that is near universal among businessmen who believe that the new flexibility of the UK labour market has given them an advantage over Continental competitors.

Halstead's employs up to 30 temporary contract workers out of a total of about 500 and uses overtime extensively to vary output. "Other European firms would give their right arm for that benefit," Roy Murphy says. But there is surprisingly little objection to the minimum wage. Smaller companies are the most worried. DRM is a family-owned textiles business, making up items for the health service and commercial laundries. Its staff of machinists is mainly female, employed on piece work, earning £4 to £5 an hour, depending on productivity – a differential which a legal minimum makes harder to maintain. Peter McGuinness, its managing director, says, "We had to spend a lot of effort making sure the wages council agreements were followed. Since their abolition, employees have not suffered and it has freed up a lot of our time."

Mr McGuinness's top priority for government action, however, is the benefits trap. There are three single mothers on his staff, and one who has just quit. "Caroline could make £180 or £200 a week before tax working here, or £140 a week with no tax on benefits. People have to be met nearly 100 per cent of the time, he says.

Perhaps the biggest encouragement for Labour is how pro-European the Northerners are. They see the Government's split over Europe as damaging their interests.

While businesses in Bury

think they can do business with Labour, the biggest task facing Tony Blair and Gordon Brown is one they can probably only fulfil in office – making the business community trust them.

Labour says it will run a stable, low-inflation economy. These businessmen will believe that when they see it.

Blair dashes public sector's hopes

The *Independent* yesterday. But what about the bosses?

have to be met nearly 100 per cent of the time, he says.

Plans to allow opt-out schools to run separate facilities for trouble-makers, announced by the Prime Minister last September, have proved very popular.

As well as bringing some schools extra income, they will prevent high levels of exclusion, which school inspectors dislike.

The Government is likely to offer £1m over the next three years to opt-out schools which want to run school-based centres for pupils who might otherwise be excluded. Instead of being told they must seek another school place, problem children will be allowed to stay on their school's roll but will be taught separately.

Officials at the Department for Education and Employment have received 61 expressions of interest and 15 firm bids from opt-out schools keen to join the scheme.

John Major announced last year that he would like to see opt-out schools running these centres, and the idea was mentioned in a White Paper in June. Ministers are also considering legislation to let groups of grant maintained schools jointly set up special units for pupils with problems.

However, plans for single

Opt-out schools plan centres for problem pupils

FRAN ABRAMS
Education Correspondent

Dozens of grant maintained schools are keen to open special units for disruptive children, it emerged yesterday. The centres could charge fees to look after other schools' problem pupils.

Plans to allow opt-out schools to run boarding facilities for pupils with behavioural problems, though, have been reports that new centres surrounded by barbed wire would help to contain those children.

Sir Bob Balchin, chairman of the Grant Maintained Schools Trust, said the moves would be welcomed by schools.

"There is a small percentage of disruptive pupils in our schools who cause mayhem out of proportion to their numbers," he said. "It is right that they should be off-site where they cannot damage the education of the 97 per cent who want to learn."

Cecil Knight, head teacher of the grant maintained Small Heath School in Birmingham, also welcomed the plans, though he said an internal unit which had been run for many years for pupils at his own school was being disbanded.

"We found it was rather an expensive way of dealing with it, but there were clearly some heads who wanted it," he said. "The idea is that if you take on a youngster from another school they would pay. You aren't going to make a huge profit but you could certainly cover your expenses."

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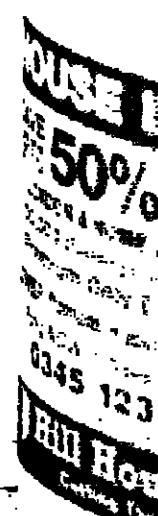


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Saxony battles Brussels in VW subsidy row

IMRE KARACS
Zwickau

The robots on the assembly line and their human assistants do not have much time to worry about Europe's future.

Every two minutes another car body arrives on its spiralling journey around the hall of the cavernous Volkswagen factory, each completing the course in 20 hours.

The new plant at the edge of Zwickau is the pride of the company and the most potent symbol of eastern Germany's renaissance.

Its fame is spreading far and wide, but in the wake of fame has come envy, turning its vaunted efficiency into a source of embarrassment.

The European Commission has ruled that VW must return the subsidies it received from the region of Saxony and said the case may touch off a "subsidy war" if left unchallenged.

"We are confronted here with an illegal situation. If VW

spends the money, we can only take this to the European Court of Justice," the Competition Commissioner, Karel van Miert, said.

But the Land Prime Minister, Kurt Biedenkopf, told Brussels to mind its own business. He has handed over part of the sum and is threatening to sue the Commission. Saxony's defiance has put Germany on a collision course with Europe.

If Europe holds firm, VW threatens to move farther east, to countries in Central Europe beyond the Commission's reach.

I think that if the right decision is not given, Volkswagen must consider taking its production elsewhere," said the Zwickau plant's spokesman, Guenter Sandmann. He said it was not a bluff, in what has become a spectacular game of chess.

At stake are 3,000 jobs at Zwickau and Chemnitz near by and 10 times as many working for outside contractors, the

suppliers that feed the assembly lines "just in time", and the service sector.

The plant's importance to the local economy is unquestionable. The rubble of the old Trabant factory has been cleared away but Zwickau's streets are still lined with derelict red-brick workshops and industrial monuments of a bygone era. A third of the pre-1990 population

of 140,000 fled to wealthier parts in the west, yet unemployment still stands at 17 per cent, not counting those on temporary job-creation programmes.

Volkswagen gave us the only great hope here after the changes," said Jens Rothe, a former Trabant worker and then fitter-turned-chairman of the works council at the new plant.

It sounds bleak but Zwickau

is one of eastern Germany's success stories, and Saxony is the main engine of the former German Democratic Republic's resurgence. Away from the warehouses, the spruced-up town centre oozes prosperity, shops, restaurants and hotels wallowing in money sucked in by the factory on its northern edge. A few Trabants discreetly parked in sidestreets are all

that remind inhabitants of their inglorious tradition. In place of stores devoid of consumer goods, residents are spoilt by modern malls, showrooms for air conditioning systems and Mercedes dealerships. Six years after reunification, the town is in danger of yuppieification. Prices are significantly lower in the west, the service incomparably better.

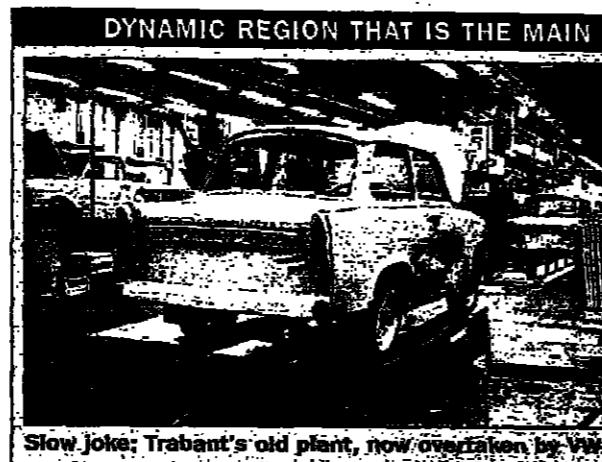
The future of the region seems bright. Siemens is building a DM4bn (£1.8bn) microchip factory in Dresden, the Saxon capital, while investment pouring into Leipzig is set to transform it into one of Europe's great trade centres. Motorways and high-speed rail networks are coming, the new telecommunications system is of the state of the art, and energy and water networks built to cope with soaring demand are nearly complete. Saxony's cultural scene, too, is throbbing with excitement. In short, it is not the sort of place, the EU argues, which needs vast amounts of

taxpayers' money to stay afloat. Shortly after 1990 the Commission approved the full VW investment package, which the company then suspended during the slump in 1992-93.

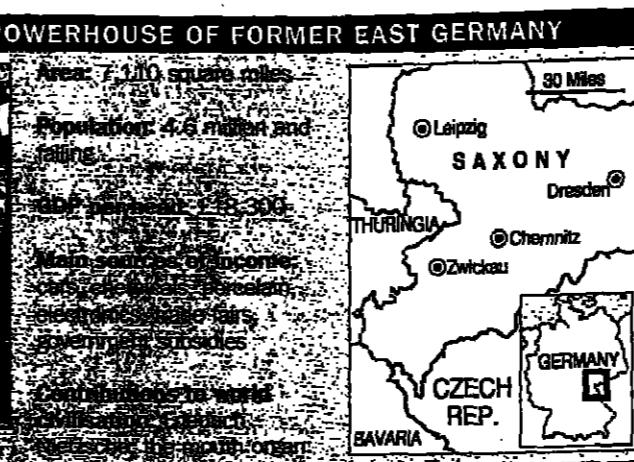
Now VW wants to complete the project, to make the plant ready for production of the new Passat in autumn and the updated Golf model that will start rolling off next year.

The buildings already stand, but without new equipment they, and the rest of the plant, are useless. The sum in question is DM1bn, of which Saxony is prepared to pay DM780m. The Commission says that is DM240m too much.

The Saxons are adamant that the Commission is not fit to make such a decision. "If you are in Brussels, you can't tell if some region needs five million marks to help stop unemployment," argued Mr Biedenkopf. "The future of the region is not determined by what the Germans mean by the word 'federalism'."



Slow joke: Trabant's old plant, now overhauled.



Perot saves his billions and seeks contributions

RUPERT CORNWELL
Washington

In a surprise opening gambit to his 1996 White House bid, the billionaire Ross Perot said yesterday he would rely for money on federal funds and contributions from individual supporters - a signal that he plans to make the reform of campaign finance a central theme of his uphill quest for the presidency.

"I want to show Washington that millions of people will contribute to a cause they believe is in the best interest of the country," Mr Perot said, explaining why he would not draw upon his own fortune of an estimated \$3bn.

That cause, as during his first presidential run four years ago, still revolves around Mr Perot's insistence on balancing the federal budget. He is already mocking the promise by the Republican candidate Bob Dole of a \$548bn across-the-board tax cut as an example of "Washington at its worst". But with President Bill Clinton able to boast that the deficit is now at

THE US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS '96

its lowest since the Carter years, campaign finance reform will come a close second as an issue.

Since 1992 Mr Perot has al-

ready lavished about \$80m on

his political ambitions, starting

with his attempt that year for

the White House, and his subsequent creation of the Reform Party, whose candidate he is and

which is likely to be on the bal-

lot in all 50 states this autumn.

Mr Perot's decision means he

is entitled to \$29m of federal

funds, a sum based on the 19 per

cent of the popular vote he won

four years ago. But he will be

permitted to spend only \$50,000

of his own money, and will

therefore have to raise \$33m in

small individual donations, as he

is entitled to do, if he is to match

the \$62m available to the Clinton and Dole campaigns.

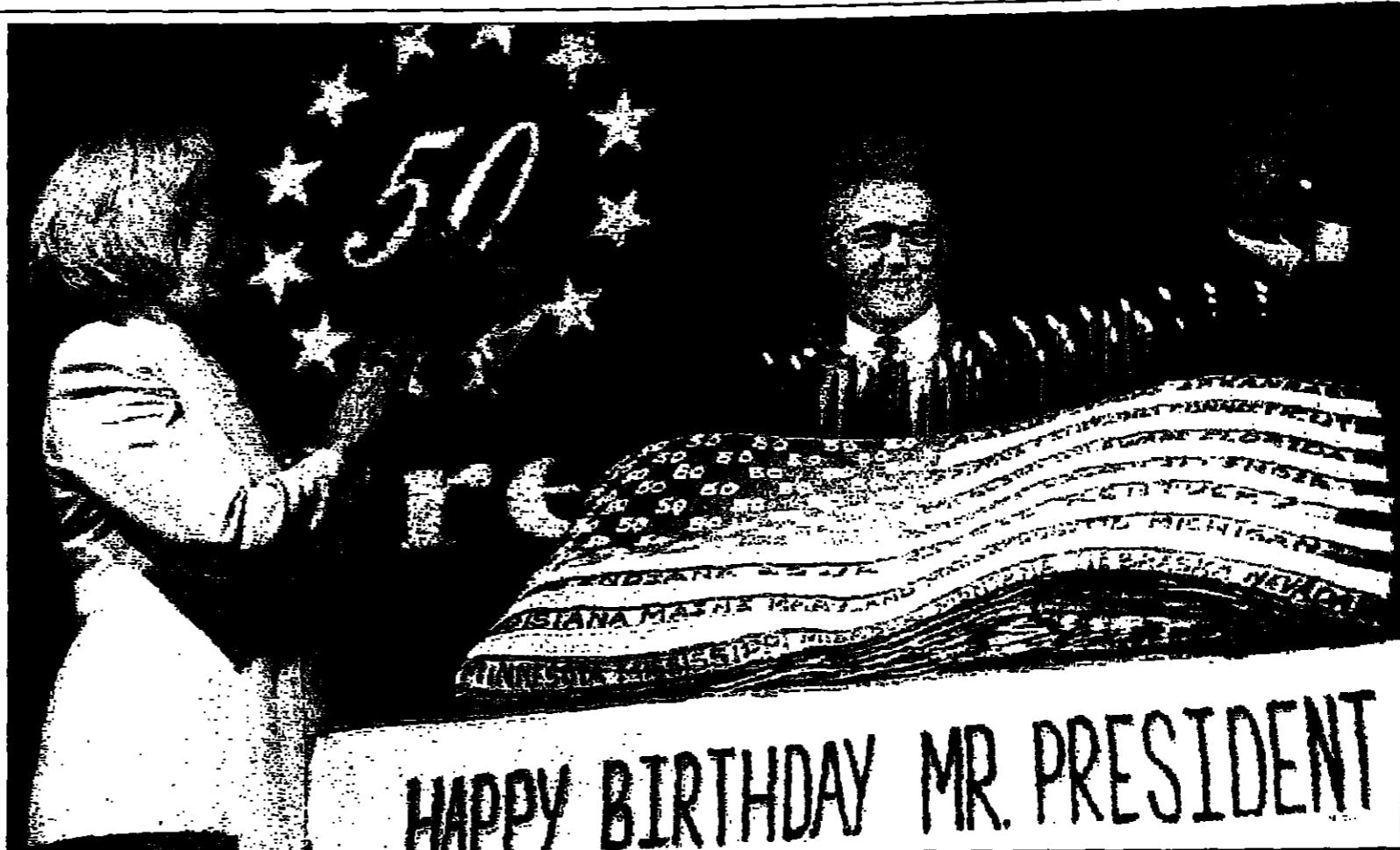
Making that task harder, Mr

Perot also says he will refuse

contributions by political action committees, a prime source of finance from corporations and special interest groups which he declares to be a scourge of Washington.

Yet as the Republican convention in San Diego showed - and its Democratic counterpart in Chicago will shortly show, corporate money flows as fast as ever. Half the \$30m cost of the San Diego convention has been met by companies. "You saw the yachts, the special interest events," Mr Perot said on CNN's Larry King show. "You don't think these guys want something in return?"

The conventional wisdom is that Mr Perot has no chance of repeating his 1992 performance. Eastwhile Perot supporters, it is said, are now likely to return to the Republicans and Bob Dole, visibly re-energized by the success of the convention and the impact of his vice-presidential choice, Jack Kemp. Mr Perot by contrast has yet to find a credible running mate. But if he can, then he may yet win enough votes to tip the outcome.



To the aid of the party: President Bill Clinton's 50th birthday celebration was expected to raise \$10m for the Democrats

Photograph: Reuter

Bosnia refugees in poll limbo

CHRISTOPHER BELLAMY
Sarajevo

Almost a million displaced people in Bosnia are unlikely to be able to return to their homes to vote in the country's elections, officials in Sarajevo said yesterday. The news reinforces fears that Bosnia's division into two parts may prove irreversible despite the best intentions of the Dayton agreement.

The director general of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Jeff Fischer, who is supervising the 14 September elections, suggested that if the displaced people were unable to return to their former homes,

facilities might be provided elsewhere for them to vote for candidates in the areas that they had fled to. About 850,000 people, out of a total electorate of some 3 million, are displaced.

Mr Fischer's suggestions prompted speculation that alternative polling stations might be set up along the 600-mile border between the two entities in Bosnia, but senior officials were quick to play that down.

Senior sources in the OSCE and in the peace implementation force, I-For, said Bosnian voters would probably realise it was not in their interest to vote in, or for, areas where there was no chance they would live again. Muslims returning to a home in

Srebrenica, a former Muslim town now in Republika Srpska, for example, would find no Muslim candidates. Similarly, Serbs returning to the Muslim-Croat federation would be unable to vote for Serb candidates.

The Dayton peace agreement endorsed the right to vote in one's former home area, but I-For has effectively admitted it cannot ensure the safe return of displaced persons. Officials are confident most people will vote from their present location.

Some observers in Sarajevo yesterday condemned the idea of giving up the right to return home, saying it ensured the division of Bosnia. However, I-For

sources believe the return of refugees to small isolated enclaves could restart the conflict.

Wherever the refugees cast their votes on 14 September Bosnia will elect a three-person presidency, an all-Bosniak assembly, and separate assemblies for the Muslim-Croat federation and Republika Srpska. Voters will also elect a president for Republika Srpska, 10 cantonal assemblies for the federation, and about 150 local councils.

It is at, if on the same day, Britons voted for a new monarch, for assemblies in England, Scotland and Wales, for a monarch of Scotland, for deputies for 10 regional assemblies in England, and in local elections.

Australian parliament stormed in cuts protest

ROBERT MILLIKEN
Sydney

Amid scenes unprecedented in Australia, dozens of chanting rioters yesterday stormed Parliament House in Canberra, smashing its front doors and leaving its public entrance hall spattered with blood. They threw acid and urine at more than 300 riot police who were called in to control the violence. It erupted when about 25,000 trade union members and Aborigines marched on Parliament House to protest against the federal government's plans to cut public spending and reduce union power.

More than 60 police were injured, 50 people were arrested and Parliament House's entrance, marble hall and souvenir shop were turned into a battle zone. A hard-core of leaders had pushed against the front doors, smashed windows and ripped iron rods from walls to use as battering rams. John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister, whose conservative Liberal-National coalition government is due to deliver its first budget today, toured the site and called the episode "a very sad and unhappy day in the life of the Australian parliament".

"What occurred was un-Australian. It was ugly. It endangered the physical well-being of men and women in the Australian Federal Police seen. It turned into a violent and

bloody end to 13 years of industrial peace that had accompanied the former Labor government's "accords" with the union movement."

Mr Howard cancelled talks on the budget he had been due to hold with the Australian Council of Trade Unions. He said that although he did not blame the council directly for the riot, the council had sponsored the rally that sparked the violence.

Thousands of union members and other community groups from all over Australia had arrived in Canberra for what was billed as one of the biggest union protests the capital has seen. It turned into a violent and

bloody end to 13 years of industrial peace that had accompanied the former Labor government's "accords" with the union movement.

Since its election last March, Mr Howard's coalition has announced plans to reform industrial relations by replacing collective wage bargaining with individual workplace contracts. There have been violent demonstrations at various industrial sites over the past few days, especially in Melbourne.

The government plans to use today's budget as the first shot in a strategy to cut up to A\$8bn (£4bn) from public spending. Some of those caught up in the riot were Aborigines protesting at an 11 per cent cut in spending on indigenous Australians.

Manila and rebels hail end of war

Malabang (Reuter) - President Fidel Ramos of the Philippines and the Muslim leader Nur Misuari embraced each other yesterday, declaring that a war which has killed 120,000 Filipinos was over. "We have agreed to... restore peace," said Mr Misuari, chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front.

The meeting was meant to help finalise a plan that has attracted opposition from the Christian majority on the main southern Philippine island of Mindanao. Some groups have threatened to take up arms against the pact, scheduled to be signed at the end of the month. In his speech Mr Ramos said he would not tolerate violent opposition to the pact, which involves setting up a peace and development council with Mr Misuari as its head.

Mr Misuari referred to problems that needed to be ironed out before the pact could be put into effect, although he did not specify them. The council is... Ramos's baby, not mine. It is up to the President to nurture this baby to maturity. "The pact envisages the council as a prelude to an expanded, Muslim-led autonomous region covering 14 southern provinces.

Muslims regard Mindanao and its nearby islands as their traditional homeland, even though they are in a minority there following decades of Christian migration.

MARKS & SPENCER SAFETY WARNING.

BUCKS FIZZ (ALL SIZES ALL FLAVOURS)

Marks & Spencer has become aware that a small number of bottles of StMichael Bucks Fizz have exploded during storage.

As a result customers are urged to open carefully any bottles of StMichael Bucks Fizz immediately (in accordance with the instructions on the back label) and to dispose of the contents to waste.

Bottles should be returned to any Marks & Spencer store where a full refund will be given.

No other StMichael wines are affected.

Marks & Spencer apologises for any inconvenience caused.

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1000-1500

international

'This man was freed from prison after three years and began again with the little girls'

Louise Jury on the anger in Sars-la-Buissière at the deaths of children in their midst

The little girls' faces stare out from the posters. But the appeals for help in finding them have been replaced with two simple words: never again.

As the investigations in Belgium's own house of horror continued yesterday, anger was mounting.

When missing girls Laetitia Delbez, 14, and Sabine Dardane, 12, were found alive in a makeshift concrete dungeon last Thursday, there was rejoicing. Joy turned to shock, however, when the bodies of eight-year-olds Julie Lejeune and Mélanie Russo were exhumed from the garden of convicted rapist Marc Dutroux in Sars-la-Buissière on Saturday. Their faces had become familiar to all from posters their families had distributed around the country in a desperate attempt to find them. Now the same photographs are on every newspaper's front page.

As the full horror of the child sex scandal became apparent, the mood turned angry. There was fury at Melchior Wathelet, the former Minister of Justice, who allowed the early release from jail of Dutroux, the 39-year-old electrician at the centre of a suspected paedophile ring.

There was bafflement that the police could have visited Dutroux's home in Sars-la-Buissière near Charleroi in the south of the country and failed to find anything – even when he was arrested and served time for robbery last year.

But most of all there was a raging hatred for Dutroux himself, his second wife Michelle Martin – who was formally charged yesterday with being an accomplice in the abduction and illegal imprisonment of children – and the rest of the gang who have violated children in a country where the family is held sacred. A fourth person, Brussels businessman Jean-Michel Nihoul, is due to appear in court today.

"He should die," said Corallo Sacra, as she gazed at the rising mound of flowers at the drive to Dutroux's home. "For the sake of those little children, he has killed them and he did die. It isn't normal what he did."

It was a sentiment echoed throughout the village, whose 700

citizens can scarcely believe what was going on in their midst.

Dutroux had moved to the village with Ms Martin three or four years ago after his early release on good behaviour from a 13-year sentence for rape.

He had no acquaintances in the village and was regarded as a thief. When items went missing



Dutroux At the centre of a suspected paedophile ring

they had the uncanny knack of finding their way to his house. It was robbery that put him away for the few crucial months last year when Mélanie and Julie starved to death in his cellar.

"We knew he was a thief but nobody knew he was convicted for rape. People feel they should have been told. Everybody is shocked," said neighbour William Capian.

The discovery of the bodies of two eight-year-old girls in a garden in southern Belgium is the latest child-sex scandal to hit the country. A former official from the Justice Ministry and the director of a children's charity were among 16 people convicted in Belgium's biggest child-sex case.

Police and experts on sex-of-

fending have noted the development of international links between paedophile groups.

want the guilty to stay inside for a very long time.

Alfred Vilain and his wife Alphonsa, had travelled from Lons carrying a petition demanding a penalty to be introduced which was fitting for crimes so incomprehensible. More than a thousand people have signed so far.

"People in Belgium are very angry," Mr Vilain said. "This man was in prison before and he was free after three years inside and began again with the little girls."

Mohammed Taleb, who lives in a village nearby, hugged his two children tightly as he said: "It's horrible. Everybody wants to kill him."

Andre Levacq, the local mayor, said they all felt sadness and revulsion. "For crimes like paedophilia, any attempt on the life, or security or health of children, people who are found guilty should stay in prison for the whole of their sentence," he said.

"We don't want to go back to the Middle Ages, we don't want anything extreme. But we do want justice."

Meanwhile Gloucestershire police, who investigated the Cromwell Street murder inquiry which led to the discovery of the remains of 10 young women and girls at the Gloucester homes of builder Frederick West and his wife Rosemary, were asked yesterday to give advice on the Sars-la-Buissière case.

Mark of respect: People gather to sign a book of mourning for murdered schoolgirls Julie Lejeune and Mélanie Russo

Photograph: AFP

Paedophiles who prey on youngsters worldwide

Internet aids information exchange on victims, reports **Jason Bennetto**

Ray Wyre, an adviser on sexual abuse for the British-based Lucy Faithfull Foundation, said paedophile cells operated throughout Europe, and can range from a few people to about 20 abusers. "We have seen a resurgence of paedophiles in Europe. Often they meet via clubs, Holland is particularly popular, or through personal contacts," he said.

In December last year a former Briton living in Belgium died from a heart attack before reaching court on child-sex charges. John Stamford, 56, was due to face charges in Belgium alleging he provided information on child prostitutes to paedophiles around the world.

Stamford was alleged to have used a homosexual travel guide, *Spartacus*, as a front for a mailing service offering information on child prostitution in Thailand, Brazil and the Philippines. The organisation was alleged to have operated through a box number in London. The details of each of the members, including their sexual prefer-

ences, the desired age of the children and preferred countries of origin were stored on a computer. The members received personalised lists of children.

Paedophile groups, of which there are an estimated 200 in Britain, will go to great lengths to cultivate the trust of their victims. This was illustrated last month when Steven Mitchell, 44, from Walton-on-Thames, became the first Briton to be convicted in the Philippines under new laws aimed at "sex tourists". Mitchell was jailed for 17 years after he was found guilty of sexually molesting two boys, aged eight and four. He had befriended a poor Filipino couple and paid for improvements to their house in order to gain access to their sons.

An estimated 200,000 Nepalese children have been sold into sexual slavery in India; in Thailand up to a quarter of a million children work in brothels; and in Colombia one third of prostitutes are thought to be under 14.

But it is the Internet which

many police officers believe is becoming the biggest danger, as paedophiles use it to transfer detailed information about children.

Belgium's worst case involving paedophiles came to court in 1983 when 16 people, including the former head of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund for Belgium, were sentenced for up to 10 years in jail. Several adults who had lent their children to adults for sex were among the defendants. Philippe Carpentier, a former Justice Ministry official, was sentenced to nine years.

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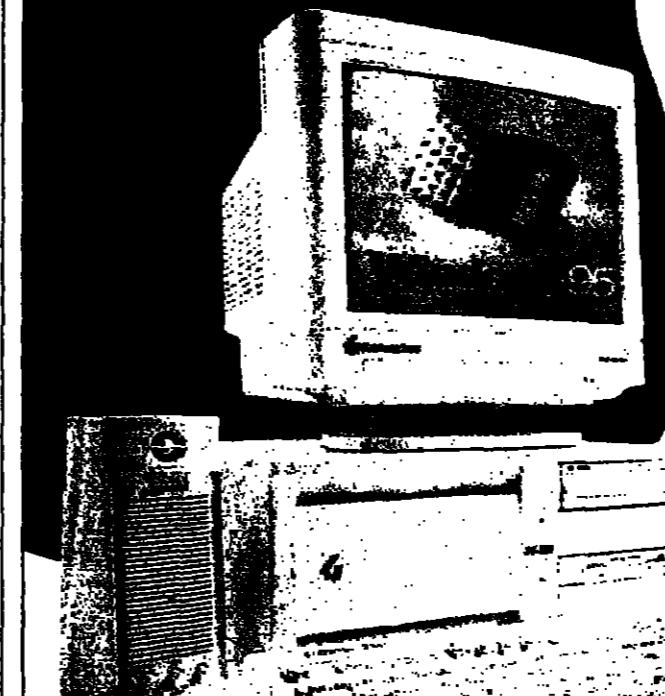
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Nicholas Faith tells how a revolution in rail catering at home has derailed the once legendary French fayre



Photograph: Hulton Getty

Early platform: At King's Cross in 1938, a "fruit girl" begins a new service on a railway which now offers an exceptional British breakfast.

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There can be few more splendid places to start the day than the dining car of the early morning Edinburgh to London train. As it roars down the coast of Northumberland, waves crashing on the shore below, the full and elaborate works of a British breakfast is delivered, fresh from the kitchen. It is a magnificent feast.

This may soon be available more widely. OBS Services, the company which runs the catering for InterCity trains, is seeking to take its wares to Europe. A few years ago, the idea of British railway food being exported would have seemed lunacy, threatening even. But quite unnoticed, there has been something of a revolution. In Britain railway food is vastly improved, while in France, traditional home of *la grande gastronomie ferroviaire*, it has gone totally downhill.

It has taken nearly 150 years for British railway caterers to live down their reputation. Charles Dickens wrote a short story which centres on the buffet at the mythical *Mugby Junction* and his description would be instantly recognisable to anyone who travelled by rail within Britain until the 1980s. The narrator tells a benighted traveller "there is a refreshment room" at Mugby Junction, "but it's a blessed circumstance for you that it's not open". Later in the story the "Boy at Mugby" describes with great glee the "stale pastry", the "sawdust sandwiches" the "ha, ha, ha, - the sherry", the appalling off-handedness of the barmaids, and the magnificent deliberate incompetence of Mrs Sniff who "did hold the public in check most beautiful. In all my time, I never set half so many cups of tea given without milk to people as wanted it with".

In another story, *A Flight* - describing a trip from London to Paris in a mere 11 hours via the newly opened railway from London to Folkestone - Dickens had already expressed his approval of the arrangements in a French refreshment room: "Large hall, long counter, long strips of dining-table, bottles of wine, plate of meat, roast chickens, little loaves of bread, basins of soup, little carafes of brandy, cakes and fruit."

In most countries "railway food" has generally been a term of approval. Switzerland's first railway was known because it brought fresh *brotli* - rolls - from Baden to Zurich in time for breakfast. In the United States the railways played a positive role in spreading civilised dining, most famously through the efforts of a former freight agent called Fred Harvey. In 1875 he persuaded the Santa Fe railroad to let him manage a small restaurant in Topeka. He called it Harvey House, a name which became famous for civilised eating throughout the whole sprawling Santa Fe system west from Topeka in Kansas to Los Angeles. From the beginning Harvey determined to maintain only the highest standards of food, drink and delicacy of presentation - his first step was to hire a chef from the Palmer House in Chicago, supposedly America's finest hotel.

Today he is best remembered for the Harvey Girls, the highly respectable and presentable waitresses he employed, most of whom stayed only a few months before



RIDING THE
IRON ROAD

marrying, generally very well. In the 1930s they and Harvey were accorded the greatest of accolades, a musical named *The Harvey Girls*, starring Judy Garland, with a song which remains a showstopper, "The Atchison Topeka and the Santa Fe".

Food invariably loomed large in any railway journey, especially those in undeveloped countries, and many otherwise obscure stops became famous (or infamous) for their dining facilities. At Voi weary travellers from Mombasa to Nairobi dined in a bungalow which Charles Miller in the book *Lunatic Express* said "looked every bit the oasis with its wine stewards, white-jacketed waiters and barmen". The main course "almost invariably consisted of iron boiled beef, rubber mashed potatoes and something that the menu called cabbage", the whole "garnished with insects".

But primitive times did not necessarily involve poor eating. On the Trans-Caspian line that most pernickety of travellers, George Curzon, thoroughly approved of "first-rate tea at 1d a glass" and equally cheap, fresh grapes and melons. In Japan, each station prided itself on its own special lunch-boxes. A lady living at the otherwise obscure station of Yokokawa invented "kamameshi", a combination of rice packed with boiled prawns, mushrooms and suitable sauces which tasted just as good hot, tepid or cold. It remains famous, and people still make special trips to buy it.

But the home of fine rail catering remained France, from the dining cars with their fresh napery and fine wines to the station buffets with their welcoming aromas of coffee and fresh croissants and their posher brethren, station restaurants like the *Train Bleu* at the Gare de Lyon in Paris. Yet today most of these have closed, or are merely relics of their former self. The French have sacrificed this noble tradition in their quest for speed. In creating the world's finest high-speed rail network they have abandoned the notion of eating at all adequately, a disaster emphasised because they have proved totally unable to provide edible examples of "le fast food", so that virtually all French sandwiches, especially those served on TGVs, are vile.

Indeed, throughout Europe, the standard of train food is not what it was. The Brussels to Milan service - beloved of European functionaries as it stops in both Luxembourg and Strasbourg - once boasted a fine Pullman dining car, with starched linen, fine wines and a steak grilled to perfection. That came to a stop three years ago; now, there are little plastic trays of inedible pasta, microwaved to death. Besides this, the InterCity sizzler is the food of the Gods.

WORLDCOVER

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Patrick Cockburn visits Karak, gripped by curfew after bread riots

Angry Jordanians ready for more trouble

"They will start again soon, God willing," said Nasser, a heavily built young man, as he lounged against the front wall of the burnt-out shell of the Jordan Bank in the centre of Karak. A bank clerk himself, he said he approved of what the demonstrators had done over the weekend, adding: "We don't want the government here."

Less than 100 yards away heavily armed Jordanian soldiers were sitting on an armoured personnel carrier guarding a crossroads. Their presence did not seem to make Nasser and his friends nervous. "Nobody's frightened here," he said. "At least the soldiers are

here." The government is treating softly because Karak and the hill towns of southern Jordan are the backdrop of its support. But the riots which began after prayers last Friday were extremely fierce. "Seven banks were burned out here," the manager of the Arab Bank said as he poked through its blackened interior. "It will cost about \$50,000 to put this right."

Down the road, two yellow earth-moving machines were scooping up the ashes which are all that remain of the interiors of four shops unfortunate enough to be on the ground floor of the local ministry of education building which came under attack as a symbol of government authority.

It is not easy to get into Karak. Since Saturday the army and police have sealed the town off and imposed a curfew. After an abortive attempt to use the one road from the Dead Sea, I entered the city from the east, where I was curiously told by an army officer at a checkpoint to report to the police headquarters. Having first said I would have to wait "because a big boss is here", the deputy chief of police finally relented and signed a letter allowing me to go on.

Ever since the riots started, the government has been ambivalent over the best way to treat the demonstrators. People in Karak say that the overreaction of the riot police, now withdrawn, swelled the initial protest. In some parts of the city, water and electricity have been cut off. Telephones only work within Karak and it is impossible to call Amman.

"About 350 people have been arrested and we heard from

somebody who was released that they are being knocked about by the police," a local observer, who did not want his name mentioned, said. He said that elite special forces, hitherto held in reserve within the medieval walls of the great crusader fortress of Karak, were beginning to advance into the town.

Down one alleyway Ahmed al-Garada, the elderly owner of the Shalala Restaurant, was happy to talk about the cause of the riot. He said: "The problem is everything, not just bread, is very expensive. The poor cannot buy anything. Only the rich can afford to live." He was mystified by the claim of Iraqi involvement, as was everybody else in Karak, saying: "That is between the leaders, between King Hussein and Saddam [President Saddam Hussein]. It



Market forces: Tomatoes and vegetables piled up in Karak, where prices are hitting the poor

Photograph: Reuter



Hussein: Troubled kingdom

better than the police."

In Amman, 50 miles north of Karak, King Hussein and his Prime Minister, Abdul-Karim Kababiti, were confidently claiming that order had been restored and the riots which started last Friday, had been fomented by the Iraqis. "They say that because they have to say something," Mohammed, a construction worker who joined the group outside the Jordan Bank, said.

There is a reason why people in Karak, an ancient hilltop town with a population of 25,000, remain confident in the face of the overwhelming pressure of the overwhelming press.

SIGNIFICANT SHORTS

Muslim guerrillas disguised as policemen massacred 63 people, including children and women, in Algeria, the London-based Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* reported yesterday. Witnesses said around 100 gunmen on Saturday set up a roadblock and stopped two buses on the road linking the provinces of M'Sila and Batna, south-east of Algiers. The guerrillas, armed with shotguns, knives and axes and wearing "dirty uniforms", killed all those holding Batna identity papers, said witnesses. *Al-Hayat* quoted its sources as saying the aim of the massacre was to "create tribal strife". The Algerian newspaper *el-Watan* said the guerrillas had killed 18 men by cutting their throats in two separate attacks. *Reuter - Cairo*

Gunmen in Haiti opened fire on the National Palace and police headquarters in Port-au-Prince, killing a civilian worker, yesterday in the latest apparent effort to destabilise the new government. The attacks follow death threats against President René Preval and former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Mr Preval, who was installed in February, has blamed the attacks on soldiers in the former army that ousted Mr Aristide in 1991 and was disbanded after a US-led military intervention in October 1994. *AP - Port-Au-Prince*

German firms' continued involvement in Libya's plans to build a chemical weapons factory was exposed by the arrest of two German businessmen accused of selling restricted technology to Tripoli. The criminal authorities in Mönchengladbach confirmed yesterday that two German firms were being investigated for shipping Dm3.2m (£1.4m) worth of computer systems to a Libyan contact in Belgium. An international arrest warrant has been issued for a third person, believed to be the go-between. *Imre Karacs - Mönchengladbach*

Former South African president FW de Klerk yesterday accepted the blame for apartheid crimes, and one of his generals acknowledged there had been "gross violation of human rights". General Constant Viljoen, former chief of the defence force and now leader of the right-wing Freedom Front party, told Archbishop Desmond Tutu's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: "We certainly made a grave mistake when we allowed our political leaders to ignore the need for a timely settlement ... so we take collective responsibility for the situation that developed." *Reuter - Cape Town*

Spaniards live up to their sociable reputation by spending more than anyone else on going out to eat and drink, and devoting the lion's share of their family budget to having fun, according to a survey by the Caja Catalonia bank. It found that Spaniards spend 25.8 per cent of their income in bars, restaurants and hotels, compared with an average of 15.3 per cent in other developed countries. While the top seven OECD countries spend most of the family income - 20.4 per cent - on rent and household expenses, for Spaniards the figure is 13.1 per cent. *Elizabeth Nash - Madrid*

The government of the canton of Zurich yesterday gave the go-ahead for a referendum that could result in the legalisation of cannabis. The Free Democratic Party says using cannabis should not be a punishable offence because 20 years of criminal prosecution has had no effect. It suggests the state should take over the trade and supervise quality. *Reuter - Zurich*

Finnish police are planning to use a harpoon-like device to halt drivers who refuse to stop, according to a television report. The technique involves mounting a "harpoon gun" on the front bumper of traffic patrol cars, which can fire a projectile with hydraulically operated bars into the boot of a fleeing vehicle. The harpoon is attached to a steel rope and officers in the pursuing car then apply their brakes to halt the runaway vehicle. *Reuter - Helsinki*

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obituaries / gazette

Rabbi Hugo Gryn

Rabbi Hugo Gryn was probably the most beloved rabbi in Great Britain.

In part, this was due to the self-sacrificing service he rendered for over 30 years to one of the largest congregations in Europe, the West London Synagogue. His students there numbered in the thousands, his admirers in the tens of thousands.

Beyond that, this gentle and great soul who went through the torment of Auschwitz came to serve a far greater community than the Jews of Great Britain and Europe. He was the leading voice in the field of interfaith where Jews and Christians (and now Muslims) come together in an effort to understand other religions through meetings, lectures and personal encounters.

Hugo Gryn moved freely and openly through that world, preserving his integrity and honouring his neighbours. He was also closely associated with television and the media, as an active participant of BBC Radio 4's *The Moral Maze* and other programmes.

Many saw him as the central figure in *The Moral Maze*, where contemporary ethical problems are discussed with great openness and honesty. Generally, it was Gryn who summed up the conclusions of the group, adding the special insights of his faith in that warm, mellifluous voice. The occasional slight stammer only added intensity and conviction as this gentle spiritual figure of small stature dominated the scene, even in his final broadcast when he was clearly ill.

He was also an adviser in the field of religious broadcasting and in the area of religious education where he has left an enduring mark. He furthermore played a significant part in all aspects of Leo Baeck College, the progressive Jewish seminary which trains Liberal and Reform rabbis for Great Britain and Europe. The RSGS (the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain), the Reform Movement, re-

cently made him its Honorary President.

Within that progressive centre movement of the Jewish community, his vision of respect for the past and the ability to create new patterns could realise itself fully. In the world after the Holocaust, Hugo Gryn taught a relevant faith and worship in a Jewish world which had to confront the anguish of the past with faith and hope.

Thus, he sponsored and initiated significant religious texts, but still remained a rabbi, teacher and lecturer working what seemed to be a 25-hour day. Recently, despite his illness, he insisted on officiating at the funeral of his young colleague Robert Shafrazi. In the last days of his illness, he left his bed to give lectures in Wales; that total dedication may have hastened the end, but for Gryn there was no other choice.

Hugo Gryn was born in Czechoslovakia on 25 June 1930, in a home of great Jewish learning and warmth. The story of his travels with his father through the "Holocaust Kingdom" has often been told. Watching his father fashioning Chanukah candles in Auschwitz with the precious fat which might have kept the spark of life going, he was instructed in spiritual resistance by the father who did not survive the ordeal.

The experience was one of many reasons which led him to the rabbinate, encouraged by Leo Baeck, who had been the head of the German Jewish community in its most difficult time and had survived the concentration camp / ghetto Theresienstadt. The Hon Lily Montagu, one of the founders of the spirituality and radical thinking of much of Liberal Judaism, also encouraged the boy she met when he was a refugee child in London.

Gryn came to the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in the late 1940s (after studying at Cambridge and London Universities), where I first met him and was instructed by his friendship. After ordination, he turned to the work of healing the wounds of the Holocaust, serving the JDC (the Joint Distribution Committee, in charge of refugee work), as a Senior Executive both in the United States and Europe.

Gryn also felt an obligation to the WUPJ (World Union for Progressive Judaism) which he later served as chairman of its executive and as a president. On their behalf, in 1957 he went to Bombay as the rabbi of its Jewish Religious Union, and stayed for the next three years.

In all areas of this work he did well, it was London which ultimately because the place of his greatest achievements. There he had earlier met and



Gryn in 1994: "To achieve peace you should anticipate it, run after it, and never cease to do all in your power to bring it about"

married Jacqueline Selby who shared so much of his work and the joy of raising their children: Gabrielle, Naomi, Rachelle and David.

Hugo Gryn was one of the great architects of Reform Judaism in Great Britain. It is significant that a movement initially shaped and carried by the grandees of the Jewish community eventually became influenced by the refugee rabbis from Europe who gave a new and deeper dimension to that earlier, colder structure. In that congregation, Gryn advised the "merchant princes" of British Jewry – but his door was open to everyone, and those who were newly found their way to his door.

During the period of his

greatest activity, the Reform movement grew and developed a new liturgy, an expanded youth programme, and a greater awareness of its need to create a new rabbinate which would work in partnerships with the Liberal movement (the ULPS).

At West London, Gryn had

been influenced by his predecessors, Rabbi Harold Reinhart and Rabbi van der Zyl, both linked to him through mutual respect and affection. In the end, he went his own way, moving towards his individual achievements. He became a world leader, particularly through his work with the Memorial Claims Conference, trying to rescue aspects of the greatness that had once been

the Jewish community in Europe.

The various survivor organisations which developed in Great Britain knew him as a concerned and helpful member; and he was one of the prominent advisors to the Imperial War Museum and its plans for Holocaust exhibition. When Ronald Senator's *Terezin Requiem* with his libretto was performed at Canterbury, Gryn was the narrator and blew the shofar, a glorious twisted ram's horn he had found in India.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn could never be parochial; his concerns reached out to all aspects of British life. He was one of the founders and leaders of the Interfaith Network, the chairman of the Standing Conference of

Interfaith Dialogues in Education, and a friend and dialogue partner with Cardinal Hume, various Archbishops of Canterbury, and the current and past Chief Rabbis of the British Commonwealth. His leadership on the British scene in many areas became so evident that the government's award of the CBE seemed almost a foregone conclusion.

Hugo Gryn was also a "rabbi's rabbi", not only the chairman of the Rabbinic Assembly, but also the personal friend to whom his colleagues could come to benefit from his advice and often his direct help. The shared work of Liberal and of Reform Judaism and also Orthodoxy meant as much to him as the interfaith dialogue.

He was a man of peace, who recognised the need for compromise but strove for equitable solutions. In Michael Harc-Duke's *Praying for Peace: Reflections on the Gulf crisis* (1994), he wrote: "All commandments have appointed times in Judaism except one: 'Seek peace and pursue it'. To achieve peace you should anticipate it, run after it, and never cease to do all in your power to bring it about."

That rule was central in Rabbi Hugo Gryn's life to his last day. His family, his countless friends, and the world have lost something infinitely precious in his death.

Albert H. Friedlander

Hugo Gryn was a survivor, writes Martin Gilbert. He survived Auschwitz, where his younger brother was murdered, and he survived the final horrendous death marches of the Second World War, at the end of which his father perished at his side. When the war came to an end he was himself very near to death. But he went on to devote half a century to life: to the celebration of life in all its forms.

Coming to Britain at the end of 1945 with a group of young fellow-survivors, he was from the first days in Britain a leader of the Standing Conference of

and a guide. He was always active in seeking the reconciliation of those who were tormented by religious, social or racial divisions (as a young rabbi in the American south, he was an early activist in the American Civil Rights movement, and a friend of Martin Luther King). He was always at the side, and on the side, of those hundreds – and indeed thousands – of people who sought his advice on personal problems.

He was non-judgmental, encouraging each individual to find his or her path. He always made the time (despite his many pastoral duties as a rabbi) to talk through the knottiest problem, whether of faith or morality; indeed, he had a depth of understanding that also made him alert and receptive to needs and demands that might seem trivial to others, but which he understood to be essential to his interlocutor.

To those who turned to him, he became a focus for hope. He combined wisdom born of wide experience (including rabbinical and social work in India) with humour. Above all, he drew from his personal experience and religious knowledge a humane approach to life that set him above the shibboleths of any one creed or philosophy. Those who were wont to hear him on the radio, to watch him on television, to listen to his sermons, to join the animated Friday night gatherings in his family circle, or to share his jokes, will treasure the memory.

Hugo Gabriel Gryn, rabbi: born Berehovo, Czechoslovakia 25 June 1930; ordained rabbi 1937; Rabbi, Jewish Religious Union, Bombay 1957-60; Executive Director, World Union for Progressive Judaism 1960-62; Senior Executive, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1962-64; Senior Rabbi, West London Synagogue 1964-90; Vice-President and Lecturer, Leo Baeck College 1964-96; married 1957 Jacqueline Selby (one son, three daughters); CBE 1992; died London 18 August 1996.

Neil Campbell



Campbell: an all-round contribution for 75 years

For an incredible three-quarters of a century, 1922 to 1996 – as undergraduate, graduate student, lecturer, reader, professor, and one of the stalwarts of the meetings and dinners of the Royal Society of Edinburgh to which he was elected in 1950 – Neil Campbell was immersed in the Chemistry Department of Edinburgh University.

He was away only for the academic years 1930-31 when he was despatched by Sir James Walker, his PhD supervisor, to study at the University of Tübingen under Professor Johannes Meisenheimer, one of the leading organic chemists of the day, and 1933-34 at Duke University in the United States.

His time at Tübingen, professionally fruitful, made a powerful impression. In 1976, I dropped a casual comment that the then Labour government's inflation difficulties were, I opined, manageable. Campbell's reaction was uncharacteristically sharp: "You weren't in Germany in 1930. I was. You did not see the barrow-loads of paper money being wheeled around. I did. Be careful!" Campbell was appalled, but hardly surprised by the events as they unfolded in Germany with the rise of Hitler, and was among a group of Edinburgh scientists who were instrumental, pre-war and post-war, in welcoming German and Jewish colleagues to Edinburgh including the Nobel prizewinner Max Born and students of a younger generation such as Charlotte Auerbach.

Neil Campbell came from a family in the solid society of Edinburgh actuaries. At the Merchant Company School of George Watson's College, he received a rigorous Scots education for which he expressed his gratitude by maintaining the closest links academic and sporting with the school. He was elected President of the Watsonian Club in 1962.

At Edinburgh University he won not only first class honours in Chemistry, but an athletics

Blue. As a quarter-miler – the 400m was unheard of in those days – he often ran against the legendary Eric Liddell, later to win gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics, and when questioned would ruefully confess "to having often admired Liddell's style – from behind".

His academic and sporting success notwithstanding, Campbell was neither prickish nor a paragon of youthful rectitude. There is a long-remembered tale, somewhat embellished over the years, but essentially true, of how, in 1924, Campbell achieved passing fame when during an unexpected delay in the opening ceremony for the King's Buildings (to this day the huge University Science Faculty complex), he successfully impersonated the young Prince of Wales, to the delight of his contemporaries but to the chagrin of the Vice-Chancellor.

Campbell's research in the field of polycyclic aromatic and heteroaromatic molecules, electrophilic aromatic substitution, and liquid crystals, gained him a lectureship. He wrote a much-used textbook, *Qualitative Organic Chemistry* (1939) and edited Schmidt's *Textbook of Organic Chemistry* (eighth edition, 1947). On account of his mastery of German, he also translated many learned articles from the German universities. Campbell had another life. Not only had he been an athlete, but he was one of the best rugby referees of his generation. Ken Scotland, the international full back for Scotland and the British Lions of yesteryear, remembered Campbell as an international schoolboy referee.

I myself first came into contact with Campbell when we were both members of the organising committee of the 1970 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh. Had it not been for Campbell and the late Sir John Inch taking the committee by a few days, gave to so many students.

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the leader page

An ID card identifies only a love of power

and a friend. He was always one who despised those who, in religious, sexual or racial terms, had a strong culture. As an American, such as he partly adopted in the American Civil Rights movement, he was always on the side of those minorities and indeed of the strongest people who fought his personal principles. He was not only a moderate, though, each individual finds his or her path. He made the time, determinedly, to talk through the most important issues – and, if that was the case, he would be involved. He was also much more than a simple political figure, who could be a personal friend.

The Government's scheme for a voluntary identity card is half-baked. Whitehall appears to be in disarray. The Northern Ireland Office is the latest department to register its doubts. It is worried by the presence on the card of the Union flag, which could easily look like a die-hards' political statement. Why all the political bother for the sake of a voluntary card? But if not the Union flag, then what? In the Tory party's present state, all European signs and symbols are going to be divisive. And what goes on the card, say, Scotland? Will the Scottish Office not insist on some Scottish identifier? Before you can have an identity card, you have to have an identity. Little wonder further delays are expected for an announcement already overdue.

The Government's confusion is significant in terms of practical governance: it says something about the inability of departments to speak to one another, or even set up the rudimentary machinery that allows a cross-departmental decision to be taken; this is an old Whitehall problem which the Tories lately have made worse. Identity cards cut straight across the turf. The Transport Department has its own logistical nightmare in trying to transform our pink and anonymous driving licences (and how many people still have the old green ones?) into Euro-approved photo-bearing licences within

less than five years. Do we need both those and ID cards? The Department of Social Security has its plans for a claimants' card which, given its current avastive mood, will probably include blood and DNA samples as well as photos and thumb prints. Meanwhile, there are complicated plans afoot involving the Treasury, Inland Revenue and the DSS to change the administration of National Insurance – a reminder that we already have national identification in the UK: we just call it NI and health service numbers. As for the Foreign Office, one of the ostensible purposes of the exercise is to provide a Euro-identifier acceptable to the police of other member states ... but what is wrong with a passport?

A national ID card is unnecessary and the Government deserves all the embarrassment it faces for not having thought more about it – preferring instead to dance to Michael Howard's ambitious piping. The problem is not just Ulster and its evidence that identity (and identification) cannot be imposed. A few years ago another ambitious Tory Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker, got a well-deserved pasting for his attempt to impose identity cards on football supporters. Memories of that may have persuaded the Government away from making cards compulsory. To work, identity cards need to express consent (a lesson you might have thought had been learnt by a govern-

ment that was forced to leave millions unpolluted). When consent goes, the government and its police officers and soldiers and computers and tax officers approach powerlessness – and no true Conservative, or indeed anyone with sense, would wish that.

The argument against even a voluntary card is that we already possess several voluntary identifiers, from licence plates to debit card numbers, and no reputable case has been made for adding a "Howardcard" to their number. But, says Mr Howard in reply, there is a good reason for a card and it is crime. "Crackdown on crime may boost Howard's stature," a sycophantic newspaper said the other day, conveniently eliding the appearance of doing something with actual changes in criminal behaviour or the effectiveness of the police. But how are voluntary cards going to be used to reduce crime? Isn't producing them going to be regarded as a ground for suspicion – in which case they cease to be voluntary? In how many instances of policing is the precise, photograph-assured identity of a person an issue in the detection or solution of crime? That, of course, is an empirical question, requiring evidence of a kind Mr Howard seems so

reluctant to commission or consider.

There are, it's true, a number of specific problems in the state's relations with its citizens for which, superficially, ID cards provide an answer. Most have to do with public-sector fraud. Here the proponents of cards suffer from an acute attack of disproportion. Those who get so excited by social security fraud forget the scale of tax evasion, notably in the corporate sector. It is as if ripping off the state by claiming benefits falsely were so much worse than ripping off the state by under-declaring earnings or those complex schemes of avoidance which respectable firms of accountants are paid in gold to devise. Should we all have identity cards because some company finance directors break the law? Of course not. So why then the hammer of a national scheme to crack the nut of housing benefit claims? Reducing such fraud involves painstaking, long-haul tracking by dedicated council officers, not gimmicks.

The state has a right and a duty to identify and number its citizens. It does this in many ways, through censuses, tax schemes and lists of many kinds. It would have the right, too, to concentrate some of the data it holds in a new, machine-readable card. But why? Every proposal to expand the ambit of the state demands the closest inspection. That principle of limited government used to be one that united members of the Conservative Party. They

could be relied upon to twitch their noses at any scent of government taking liberties. What has happened to a party that could once be relied upon – right or wrong – to sound a warning? Is the corruption of that Thatcherite love of state power still so strong in Mr Major's government that it can still, proceed with a proposal with so little serious internal discussion? One look at Michael Howard and the only answer is yes.

Bad service at a bargain price

We like to think of ourselves as a country of retail sophisticates – Tesco and Asda for groceries, John Lewis and House of Fraser for household goods and so forth. But according to new data we are turning into a country of rough shoppers who buy its food and detergents at Aldi and kettles and toys at Argos, whose catalogue sales techniques are borrowed from the US. You would not call either store sophisticated. At Aldi, personal service is minimal; at Argos you do it all yourself, short of lugging the goods out of the warehouse. Yet Aldi grew big last year and Argos's profits are up by nearly 50 per cent. A nation of shopkeepers is turning into a nation of bargain-hunters.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Handout to airlines from airport shops

Sir: Terence Conran ("What is an airport for?", 17 August) is quite right to point out that BAA's retailing activities are an unregulated monopoly and that BAA is seeking every way possible to boost this side of its business. The shopping element in its Terminal 5 application is the size of 12 superstores.

It is sometimes argued that BAA's retailing profits are acceptable because they finance the airports' infrastructure. But this is not what happens. Retailing profits subsidise airlines.

The way BAA is regulated is that its retailing profits are lumped together with its profits from airport charges – the "single till" approach. The Airports Act 1986 only gives BAA's regulators (the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Civil Aviation Authority) the power to regulate airport charges – retailing profits are exempt unless these activities are against the public interest. However, the MMC does not share Terence Conran's definition of the public interest. Therefore, the more BAA earns from retailing the more its regulators cap or reduce airport charges.

Airport charges at Heathrow are, as a result of this perverse regulatory regime, amongst the lowest in the world, leading to an insatiable demand for landing slots, endless expansion of the airport and the cause of such environmental damage to London.

The undercharging (and hence the subsidy) to profitable UK airlines and unprofitable foreign airlines is estimated to amount to between £250m and £500m a year – an amount which should accrue to the public purse. The Government cannot allow this subsidy to continue and must urgently review the regulatory regime and at the same time impose an environmental limit on the number of flights into Heathrow.

GIDEON NELLEN
London W1

Sir: Terence Conran is wrong when he bemoans the booming airport shopping business at Heathrow and Gatwick airports. As a frequent traveller through Heathrow, I can assure him that the new Terminal 1 is a vast improvement on the old, even though some of the departure lounges need refurbishment (has he not seen the new pier recently opened?).

If increased retail space is the price for making the whole terminal more spacious and user-friendly, then that's fine by me. If Sir Terence has ever had to endure a long delay at a major US airport, or even, say, in Athens, then I think he will appreciate better just what a world-class facility Heathrow airport is.

RICHARD HOLDRUP
E-mail: RHoldrup@aol.com

Mandelson under friendly fire

Sir: Last week Peter Mandelson was accused by Clare Short of being "a man in the dark". This week Roy Hattersley complains that Mr Mandelson is "in the West and preferring compliant desots to more representative Islamic governments".

As I understand the matter,



"Yer, we're looking for drug pushers. What A-levels have you got?"

frontbencher, charged by Tony Blair with responsibility for planning the general election campaign. Surely it is Mr Mandelson's job to put Labour's case in the media.

It seems a great shame that Roy Hattersley, at the end of a political career distinguished by sound judgement and loyalty, cannot let Labour's current leaders get on with the job of beating the Tories, free from "friendly fire".

PAUL RICHARDS
Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Billerica
London W6

The blame for ancient hatreds

Sir: Innocence and guilt are characteristics of the actions of individuals, and John Norman is wrong to apply them to whole societies (Letters, 17 August). Medieval Muslims and Christians who acted in accordance with the norms of their respective religions were innocent, but we should recognise that the Christian norm of religious intolerance was further from modern ideas than was Islamic acceptance of other religions' right to exist.

On the other hand, modern Western leaders are guilty of acting contrary to their norms in turning or attempting to turn most Muslim countries into vassal states of the West and preferring compliant desots to more representative Islamic governments.

P J STEWART
E-mail: philip.stewart@plant.sciences.ox.ac.uk

Flies in the primordial soup

Sir: Even with the most optimistic of assumptions the emergence of a primitive living system from a suitably constructed primordial soup, including amino acids, nucleotides etc, is an exceedingly improbable process ("Water found by the light of a Jupiter moon", 15 August). For instance, calculations by Fred Hoyle and myself, and independently by Francis Crick, have led to estimates for the odds against the occurrence of life that can only be described as being superastronomical.

As long as the Earth was the only planet where life is found a critic of "cosmic life" can take refuge in the statement that a *posteriori* statistics are irrelevant. Even the most improbable events do indeed occur, the critic could say, in defence of the paradigm of Earth-centred life. And in defiance of Copernican philosophy one might even assert that this exceedingly improbable – well-nigh miraculous – event took place here on the Earth.

The discovery of life on at least one other planet would instantly rule out this line of argument, however.

Identical, superastronomically improbable transitions from non-life to life could not have happened independently on two separate planetary objects. It is immeasurably more probable that the two sites were either cross-infected, or co-infected from a common cosmic source. In either case the firm requirement is for microbial life to be transferred across astronomical

distances. *Panspermia* is vindicated and the Earth-centred primordial soup would seem to be ruled out.

N C WICKRAMASINGHE
Cardiff

Sydney Mail in 1882-83 then as a book in 1888 and has never been out of print since, was at least partly due to the notoriety of the Kelly gang.

ALAN BRISSENDEN
Burnside, South Australia

In isolation, he is right about the CTBT. However, as part of a series of graduated actions leading finally to a global Nuclear Weapons Convention, the test ban would be an extremely important document.

On the same day as your article appeared, CND published its *Blueprint for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World*, co-authored by myself. The blueprint argues for an immediate start to negotiations leading to a Nuclear Weapons Convention that would bring about worldwide nuclear disarmament within 25 years.

The blueprint puts the case for a series of steps, starting with a CTBT and followed by a ban on the production of fissile materials, an agreement on a policy of No First Use of nuclear weapons, an international fund to support the costs of disarmament and other

actions designed to improve international security.

The irony of the Indian position is that they appear more committed to complete nuclear disarmament than any of the nuclear powers currently eager to secure a test ban.

MARTIN JONES
Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
London N7

Children lose visual memories

Sir: One faculty previously held in abundance by children and now in decline ("The loss of our innocence", 15 August) lies within their visual awareness and experience. Art education has suffered not only from the reduction of visual memories of "outdoors" – landscapes, street scenes, backyards etc – which previously children could refer to, but also as a result of the young and impressionable receiving an increasing amount of imagery produced by computers and television.

Both primary and secondary school pupils demonstrate today a visual repertoire far inferior to that which existed even ten years ago. If the GCE art examinations, which demanded a swift feeling response to a set of titles for paintings or designs (which existed up to the 1970s) were to be set today it is difficult to imagine many candidates being able to cope adequately. In many art departments today that aspect of "remembered distilled experience" cannot be employed as a starting point.

CHRISTOPHER C MOXLEY
Art teacher
Radcliffe, Greater Manchester

Fact-packed family life

Sir: R Riley's letter (17 August) bewailing his daughter's lack of general knowledge, despite having gained a university place, is indeed appalling. What have the Riley family been doing? Have they never taken the daughter outside the family home? Never engaged in discussion around the lunch table or played quiz games on winter evenings? Have they never watched informative television programmes together?

The education of children does not take place exclusively between the hours of 9 and 4.30. Leap from your sofa, Mr Riley. It is not too late to make up for all those years of neglect.

JANET WHITE
Ringmer, East Sussex

Sir: R Riley trots out the same complaint about students' lack of "general knowledge" that was levelled when I was a student 40 years ago and regularly since (and doubtless before) that time. There are two definitions of general knowledge: (i) things I know and think you ought to know too; (ii) things you've read up recently and I haven't. R Riley clearly subscribes to the former. I recommend the latter to his daughter.

Professor R H MCKLEM
Edinburgh

Sir: I share some of the concerns expressed about the general knowledge of A-level students. However, there seems to be a simple solution. My daughter (just graduated in chemistry) and son (just completed A-levels) scored nearly 100 per cent on the questions set by R Riley, and attributed their success to regular participation in pub quizzes.

R K LITTLEJOHN
Twyford, Berkshire

Sir: R Riley's daughter must be thankful that her parent has just been granted a newspaper space. Now perhaps she can rest easy and look forward to an exciting time at university instead of overloading her talents with trivia.

MICHAEL MITCHELL
Flackwell Heath, Buckinghamshire

After Monkees

Sir: Although it is true that Mike Nesmith's mother invented Liquid Paper (not Tipp-Ex) and that the company was bought by Gillette in 1980, I suspect his non-appearance at the recent Monkees reunion is for reasons other than his inheritance (John Walsh, 15 August). Mike Nesmith left the Monkees and became in my view a much-admired artist, with over 20 album releases, and a much sought-after record producer.

LOUIS BERK
E-mail: lberk@maple.win.uk.net

Porn free

Sir: Do the police understand how the Internet works? They may, indeed, succeed in removing some newsgroups from UK service providers' servers ("Police get tough on Internet's hard-core porn", 16 August). The only consequence of note will be the saturation of the UK's external bandwidth.

With every server on the planet just a mouse-click away, their chances of removing all pornography from the Internet are the same as those of removing all the salt from the sea.

PHIL PAYNE
E-mail: Phil@ievers.com

analysis

The real threat of Iranian terrorism

Although they pose little risk to Western targets on Western soil, the activities of Iranian extremists are driving a wedge between the US and Europe, writes Nicholas Bethell

Iran is the fountain of all terrorism, at least this was the word from Washington in the wake of the TWA disaster, violence in Bahrain and the explosion at Al-Khobar in Saudi Arabia. Press leaks from the US administration, some of them inspired by Secretary of Defense, William Perry, on his return from the Persian Gulf, give the impression that the Ayatollahs have upped the terrorist stakes and are now embarked on a new policy of mass murder throughout the western world.

Strong American feelings about Iran date back to their expulsion from the country in 1979-80 and the hostage crisis, when the United States was humiliated, its foreign service most of all. Several key State Department officials from that wretched year, including Warren Christopher and Tony Lake, are in even more powerful positions today. There is a presidential election and Mr Clinton is expected to "do something" against Iran, which has few friends among those who will be voting in November.

Recently American officials have had to backtrack at the same time analysing what Iranian terrorism actually is. What do these violent men of Islam do? What are their targets? Are they escalating their campaign?

Western experts agree that, whereas Iran is undoubtedly among the world's worst terrorist nations, it is not yet in the business of attacking Western targets on American or European territory. Recent events offer no good reason why this analysis should be varied.

Their most blatant behaviour is reserved for action against individual Iranian dissidents. Twelve have been murdered in Europe so far this year, most of them members of the left-wing Mujahedeen ul-Khalq violent opposition movement, others of them former high officials from the Shah's regime. Iran admits nothing, but if sees itself as entitled to kill Mujahedeen members. They are, after all, funded by the great enemy, Baghdad, and they carry out acts of violence inside Iran in pursuit of their declared aim, the overthrow of the Islamic republic.



Some days ago, I asked Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, why his government had named a nearby street after the hunger striker Bobby Sands, giving the impression that Iran supports the IRA. He replied: "It is because you in Britain give safe haven to terrorists from the Mujahedeen, who kill our people. Men from your House of Commons and House of Lords receive them and speak up for them."

The Iranian chargé d'affairs in London, Gholamreza Ansari, says: "A large and unbelievable number of innocent civilian people, including a president and a prime minister, MPs and ministers, have been killed by the Mujahedeen in Iran." Iran's director of prisons, Assadullah Lajvardi, told me: "These Communists come into

our country and kill maybe 50 of our people. Should we leave them alone to kill another 50? They deserve to be executed."

I am sure that Mr Lajvardi meant that such people should be executed outside Iran as well as inside it. And he would see countries like Britain, France and Germany, which allow the Mujahedeen to operate politically, as their accomplices. He would think of Iran as a victim of terrorism rather than as a perpetrator.

However, it's not only the violent who are killed by Iranian agents. Two such men are today in prison in France, convicted of having cut the throat of the Shah's last Prime Minister, Shahnour Baluchian, in Paris in August 1991. In Germany there is a warrant out for the arrest of Iran's Minister for Intelligence for

allegedly bombing a dissident group in Berlin in 1994. British officials believe that in recent years, 40 dissidents, by no means all of them violent, have been killed in Europe by the Iranian secret police, and others by Turkey and Iraq.

In spite of the overwhelming evidence available to Western experts on the Bakhtiar case and others, the Iranian government refuses to admit that it has ever acted violently outside its own borders. "Show me your proof," said Mahmoud Vaezi, Iran's Minister for Relations with Europe and America, when I put the Bakhtiar case to him. "These are no more than rumours dreamt up by our enemies in Iraq, or by Israel." But he knew, I think, that I did not believe him.

In one particular case Iran has been ready to act against a Western target. This is the matter of Salman Rushdie. But Iran today would like the Rushdie issue to be forgotten. The chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Committee on Foreign Policy, Mohammed Larjani, says: "Iran has dissociated itself from the fatwa. There will be no Iranian hit squads trying to carry out the death sentence. These assurances ought to be enough for you, but Britain wants more. Britain demands that we sign a paper that amounts to an admission of guilt. This is unacceptable."

Again, Dr Larjani was being less than candid. An Iranian religious foundation known as

"15th Khordad" still offers a \$2m bounty to anyone who kills the British writer. This is an incitement to murder that Iran does nothing to silence.

Iran's protestation that its government cannot interfere in the finances of a private body does not impress the British side. Meanwhile, there are still, probably, Iranian agents keen to carry out what Ayatollah Khomeini ordered.

Another area of violence where Iran is active involves terrorism against Israel. British officials believe that Iranian agents were responsible for the bomb explosion and consequent loss of life at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires last year. Iran also, by its own admission, helps the Hezbollah movement in Lebanon, which fires rockets into Israeli territory. Iran will not concede that this amounts to complicity in terrorism.

Dr Zarif says: "Hizbollah has elected members in the Lebanese Parliament and it is not easy to call them terrorists just because they oppose the Israeli occupation of Southern Lebanon. We help Hizbollah with food and medicines." Again, he is not telling the full truth.

A third category of Iranian terrorism involves the Persian Gulf area, especially Bahrain, where there is Shi'ite majority and where Iran has been closely engaged for many decades.

British experts are convinced that some at least of the recent violence in Bahrain is Iran's work, to the extent that some of those involved were trained in Iranian camps in subversive techniques and provided with equipment and money.

Yet even here, Iran admits nothing and tries to justify a strong political stance. Mr Vaezi says: "Why does the West emphasise Iran's human rights problems? Kuwait has no valid parliament at all. Neither does Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, a woman cannot drive a car and Christian worship is forbidden. Yet you never criticise these countries. You only attack Iran. You are very selective." Inevitably one is brought back to the Al-Khobar bomb and the alarming reports emerging from Washington sources these past days. The difference between TWA and Al-Khobar is that, whereas there is no evidence at all to link Iran with the TWA outrage, any more than there is with the World Trade Center or Oklahoma or Atlanta explosions, there are some circumstantial features of the Saudi Arabian bombing that give rise to suspicion.

American experts are now no longer jumping to conclusions, but they are worried by how skilfully and effectively the Al-Khobar operation was carried out. They doubt whether Saudi Arabian dissidents on their own could be capable of such a spectacular achievement against a tough



The American Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, (above) in January 1981, signing the agreement to end the American hostage crisis, which began in November 1979, when he was a key official in the State Department. Photographs: AP

American target. They sense foreign involvement and they know how deeply Iran resents the American military presence in Saudi Arabia.

They also detect in Iranian press reports of the explosion the same triumphalism as followed the bombing of the US Marine base in Beirut in 1984. The Iranian media is taking pains to remind Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states that the death of American Marines in 1984 was followed by American withdrawal from the Lebanon, with dire consequences for America's friends in that country.

American analysts, while agreeing that the evidence against Iran in this matter remains circumstantial, see this as a very threatening message.

The experts do not, therefore, blame Iran for purely anti-Western outrages, although they are sure of Iranian guilt in the three categories of terrorism mentioned above.

For instance, they hold Libya, not Iran, responsible for the Lockerbie disaster. Even though Iran has an apparent motive for revenge - the accidental destruction of an Iranian airliner by an American missile - Iran's name is not in the frame over Lockerbie. The evidence assembled by the Scottish police, which cannot yet be made public, points clearly to the two named Libyan assassins.

British officials nevertheless remain suspicious of Iranian intentions in the Rushdie case and they believe that Iran has the ability to attack more Western targets in the West, if their policies should change. Men are being trained in Iran for this eventualities and they can be activated if the West increases its pressure. Also an aggressive posture towards Europe and North America remains one of the characteristics of the Islamic Revolution. And, although many in Iran would like this to change and more practical policies to prevail, there is nothing yet to suggest that Mr Rafsanjani and his clerical rulers will allow such a change of policy, or that the technologists will be

able to overrule the men of religious principle.

One of the most serious consequences for the Western world is that divisions now arise between Europe and the US. This was shown most vividly in April 1995 when the American company Conoco was awarded a \$600m contract for an Iranian gas project. The US administration stepped in to prevent Conoco from concluding the deal, only to see it picked up by the French company CFP Total.

An American official says: "The Europeans really irritate us over Iran. We make sacrifices in an effort to tackle a problem that threatens the security of us all, only to see our allies making profits out of what we have voluntarily given up. It is all very well for Europe to engage in 'critical dialogue'. We would do the same. We do not want to start a war. But if dialogue fails and terrorism continues, one must be prepared to exert pressure. Europe is not doing this."

The European Union, on the other hand, is conscious of the great export potential of Iran. It sees the Iranian issue as illustrating American foreign policy at its most clumsy, with an administration keen to demonstrate its machismo in the run-up to an election, indulging in frothy press releases and unreliable briefings which it then has to retract, and then proceeds to try to enforce American law outside American territory.

Iran, therefore, is happy to continue its carefully planned scale of terrorism, avoiding Western targets but using violent means in many other parts of the world. From the point of view of the mullahs, this policy has several merits. It is cautious enough to prevent the US from being so angered that they launch an armed response. At the same time, it is bold enough to keep the fervour of Islamic revolution alive, to infuriate the entire Western world and to create divisions between Europe and North America.

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Fact, fantasy, and the colour of teapots

Golden Rules Of Life, part 267.

At one end of knowledge we have scientific laws. At the other end we have proverbs. But between there are a vast number of rules governing human behaviour that have never been codified. This is part of our ongoing attempt to list them all.

"Never make tea in a brown teapot."

Many old-fashioned teapots are coloured dark brown inside and out, which is the worst possible colour for a teapot. Not only is it very hard to see if the pot is clean inside or not, it is also impossible to see how much tea you have put in, assuming of course that you use tea-leaves. Tea-leaves are brown. Once inside a brown pot they disappear. If you lose count of how many teaspoons you have already put in, it is no use glancing in the pot.

You will see nothing. Nor will you be able to see if you have already put a bit of boiling water inside to warm the pot, and forgotten to pour it

out again. Water is not dark brown but it is transparent, which comes to the same thing.

Suggested solution: either switch to tea-bags or rig up a small bulb inside your brown teapot that can be switched on to illuminate the interior.

Corollary: never use tea-bags in a white teapot decorated internally with small rectangles.

"When you lose your car keys, the first place to look for them is in the car door while parked in big cities for an hour or two and come back to find them (and the car) still miraculously there."

When car keys go missing, people rush madly all over the house, looking in pockets and handbags, whereas they are much more likely to find them in the door of the car. This is because we tend to go out to the car and unlock it to load it, or let people gradually get in, and leave the keys in the door till we need them. Then, when everyone is aboard, and the last person has made the last visit to the loo before the journey, you start patting your pockets for the keys forgetting you have left them in the door.

Corollary: if you are looking



Miles Kington

I myself have left car keys in the car door while parked in big cities for an hour or two and come back to find them (and the car) still miraculously there.

Suggested solution: fix a little shackle to the under-neck of your car and leave your keys shackled out of sight to the bottom of your car, where they will always be available to hunt down the right car. But it is very easy to change the name of your company to the same as your car, and call your company, for instance, 451 SGA.

Corollary: if you are looking

for a car to steal and don't know how to pick locks, just wander the streets looking for a car with keys stuck in the door.

"There is nothing unusual about a personalised car number plate. ALL car number plates are personalised."

Every car number has a meaning for someone, though usually not the owner. If your car has the number 451 SGA, for instance, it may not mean anything to you, but the odds are that someone in some town living at No 451 St George's Avenue would pay good money for a swap. The only problem is in finding them.

Suggested solution: if you wish to have a car number plate exactly the same as your business, it is next to impossible to hunt down the right car. But it is very easy to change the name of your company to the same as your car, and call your company, for instance, 451 SGA.

Corollary: all car number plates are impersonal to everyone except the owner.

"There is no such thing as fantasy football, except on the football pitch."

Fantasy football, the name given to the football version of dreaming up a world cricket XI, is the worst possible name for it, because fantasy is based on a dream of the future, and the way fantasy football is scored is based on what has already happened. A spectator at a live match is fired entirely by thoughts of what may happen between now and the end of the match, by whether his team may equalise or pull ahead, or whatever. But fantasy football is rooted entirely in what actually happens.

Real football is based on a fantasy of what may happen. Newcastle United supporters, for instance, are currently playing football at a very high fantasy level, higher than anything that happens in fantasy football.

Suggested solution: sell Alan Shearer back to Blackburn Rovers.

Corollary: there is no such thing as fantasy snooker.

So they say she's not fit to be a mother

Women who are infertile should not bear the brunt of our anxieties about parenthood

Yet another "scandalous" infertility case has hit the headlines. A woman who has had three children taken into care and two abortions, is seeking IVF (test-tube baby) treatment on the NHS. What's more, her consultant and her GP are supporting her request. Good story.

And there are plenty more where that came from. The Mandy Allwood occupiers may be the most extreme example yet, but infertility clinics can be guaranteed to turn out hot stories by the dozen, tales of "unsuitable" people whom the state has assisted to become parents. With 3,000 IVF babies born a year and numbers rising annually, the tabloid potential is tremendous.

But IVF doctors are becoming increasingly anxious, as one after another gets roughed up by the press. The doyen of them all, Lord Winston of Hammersmith Hospital, was done over recently for agreeing to give IVF to an HIV-positive woman. (He protested that she might have many good years ahead, and her husband was healthy.) But Lord Winston, like most infertility doctors, has always said he will not decide who will make the best parents: "I refuse to play God." It is easy to understand why – after

all, God himself does the job absurdly badly.

The doctors may wriggle out of this particular who-lives-and-who-dies dilemma, though they busily play God in a number of other medical specialisms, deciding who gets kidneys or at what stage "Do Not Resuscitate" notices are added to patients' notes. Rationing has always been a thinly veiled fact of life in the NHS, but rarely can it have been done as randomly and unfairly as over IVF. And that is partly because doctors have refused to operate it, leaving it up to the whim of local health authorities. The Department of Health refuses to issue guidelines to ensure that there is at least equal treatment everywhere. This lottery guarantees an outcry whenever an apparently "undeserving" woman gets treatment.

This latest case is happening at King's College Hospital, London. Like the other main centres, they offer IVF to any patients from health authorities with whom they have contracts, and each sets its own criteria for treatment. That means patients are treated according to postcode – one of the most unjust aspects of the current NHS.

This patient lives in the catchment area of Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark

Health Authority, one of the more flexible purchasers. According to the Chief Executive, their contract with King's stipulates that IVF should be available to women who have no surviving children of the current relationship (but could have from previous relationships), and it does not stipulate that they must be married. But if, say, the woman had been sent by East Riding Health Authority, she would have had to be married for at least three years, with no children, not even from a previous relationship, or adopted.

At King's College all patients are required to fill out a long form, which is also sent to their GPs. If there are doubts, a social worker can be called in to investigate

and difficult cases go to a hospital ethics committee. When the prospective parents have passed the basic criteria, each according to their health authority, they are placed on a list strictly in order of first come first served. "That can be harrowing for us," says Dr Virginia Bolton. "We all have our own idea of which ones we think are the most deserving. But in the end, there is no other way to choose."

In this case the social worker found that the woman had had a disastrous start in life: when she was 23 her three children were taken into care after her husband and father sexually assaulted them. But for the last 10 years she has lived in a stable relationship. Is she never to escape her calamitous past?

There is an inchoate rumble of anxiety about fertility treatment, with a deep moral confusion at the heart of it. Are people indifferent that children are being born of less than perfect parents? Or is it about the spending of NHS money? If unsatisfactory parents can buy IVF in private clinics (most of it is privately paid for) is that OK?

Who is to decide whether a couple will make good parents? Forty per cent of the married will divorce. Some unhappy couples

mistakenly want a child to "save" a bad marriage. All of us can point to apparently "good" parents with catastrophic children, and vice versa. So doctors are right to be wary of acting as moral police.

If MPs really did want more regulation, where would they start? Some 16,000 couples undergo treatment every year. Could they all be vetted with the sort of thoroughness expected in adoption? Then there are the hundreds of thousands of couples who have some kind of infertility treatment. Would they, too, have to be vetted before they were treated? Drugs to increase ovulation, for instance, are often given by GPs. One in six couples seek medical advice at some point for infertility. Should the state judge the suitability of all these women, with some monstrous Ministry of Motherhood?

If not, then why pick on the most infertile as the only humans to be subjected to examination in fitness for parenthood? Anne Weyman, head of the Family Planning Association, says everyone needs to be taught parenting. But, she asks, why vent all society's anxieties about inadequate parents on those who happen to need doctors to assist in conception?

How to handle a woman: for sales reps

Ann Treneman on the marketing obsession with marital status

There is one question obsessing the world of tele-marketing and that is whether or not I am married. I know this because people from all over Britain keep ringing up and asking. First they soften me up by mentioning wonderful deals on double glazing, garage doors, a new kitchen, a time-share. Then they pop that question: "Are you married?"

Other women tell the same story. They've just got to the point in the sales pitch where they are wondering if there really could be such a thing as a free luncheonette, when they are jolted out of their lassitude by the marital status question. The correct answer, of course, is none of your business – and tele-marketing people should take that statement literally. This, as they say in America, is a No Sale Situation.

"There really is nothing sexist about it all," says Ralph Grenier, business development manager for Henderson garage doors. "Ladies seem to think it is sexist but it's for security reasons and also because we want to see both people together." Mr Grenier says the factual version of this question is "When is a good time to catch you together?" Paranoid types will see through that immediately, however.

Statistics show that one in three is to couples ends in a successful sale while in a "singlet", to use the jargon, the figure is one in 10. Many "singletons" will think it's a miracle that there is even one sale. Sandra Birch Jones, who runs Professional Telesales in Sevenoaks, tells this tale of trying to buy a kitchen. "The company asked when my husband would be there and said they would not come round if he was not. They have this outmoded belief that men hold the purse strings," she says. Her salespeople do not ask that question. Needless to say, she bought her kitchen elsewhere.

Joy Tinkler, one of Everest's top sales reps, says the key is to find the decision-maker. "It's something you just get a feel for," she says. "A lot of reps won't present to a woman on her own. I have no qualms about selling to a lady on her own if I realise she is the decision maker."

She tells the story about buying a car. A friend male, went with her. The car salesman made a beeline for the chap, showing him everything in the showroom. After 45 minutes the salesman realised his mistake and rushed up to her: "I told him the car I wanted. He said he could only do £2,500. I said £1,000, no deal and that I also wanted a bunch of flowers for his negligence. And I got it, too."

So the next time a stranger poses the "married" question, think of Joy Tinkler. She says the proper question, for security reasons, is: "Would you like to have somebody with you during the visit?" That's how to sell to a woman – or a man.

Whose democracy is it anyway?

The Royal Family has formed a committee to decide its own future, but decisions like this are too important to be left to self-interested parties, argues Anthony Barnett

So now we know. A committee of key Royals and their sophisticated advisers meet every six months to assess the way ahead. How is the monarchy doing? Have any changes taken place that deserve a response from the Royal Family? The political philosophy behind such meetings draws on the experience of relatives who were insufficiently flexible, including their own ancestors 350 years ago. The art of staying royal is to make it appear that you are not against all change.

This might even necessitate accepting some actual change. Paying the bottom rate of tax, for example, while leaving open the option of escape from such impositions by making them voluntary. Lord Blake summed up the attitude marvellously on the radio yesterday. "Of course it is good that people should 'talk' about reforms, he emphasised. But, he added, the changes now being talked about, such as for the heir to be allowed to marry a Catholic or equal opportunity for women to accede to the throne, are quite unnecessary.

When Lord Blake tells us he is in favour of talk, one has a vision of another hundred years of velvet tones pouring from the mouths of constitutional experts. Yet this seems more like a crude filibuster masquerading as generosity of wisdom. Perhaps it is motivated by a conservatism deeper than the desire to see the Royals stay as they are; the conservatism that wants to ensure that the Royals and their experts alone decide if and when there is to be reform. Public opinion will be assessed, to help ensure con-

sent; but private opinion, in the form of the Royal circle, will decide.

This confirms what may have been obvious to all those "in the know" – that we in Britain are actively ruled.

The Royals are not a family passively accepting their fate. They constantly survey their role and seek to preserve their influence. Yet the official confirmation of the committee's existence gives a new edge to questions about the legitimacy of this approach.

Put it like this. To whom does the Royal Family belong? In the past such a query would have been pointless. There was a ruling order, the City, the Church (there was no need to say what of), the landed aristocracy, the military, the Empire, the civil servants, the London clubs (including the Commons). The ruled. Everyone knew it. Most people liked it. Consent took the form of deference and enchantment personified by the monarch. It didn't matter if personally he was a stammering stamp collector. The system was brilliant. The monarch belonged to it. And so on accordingly.

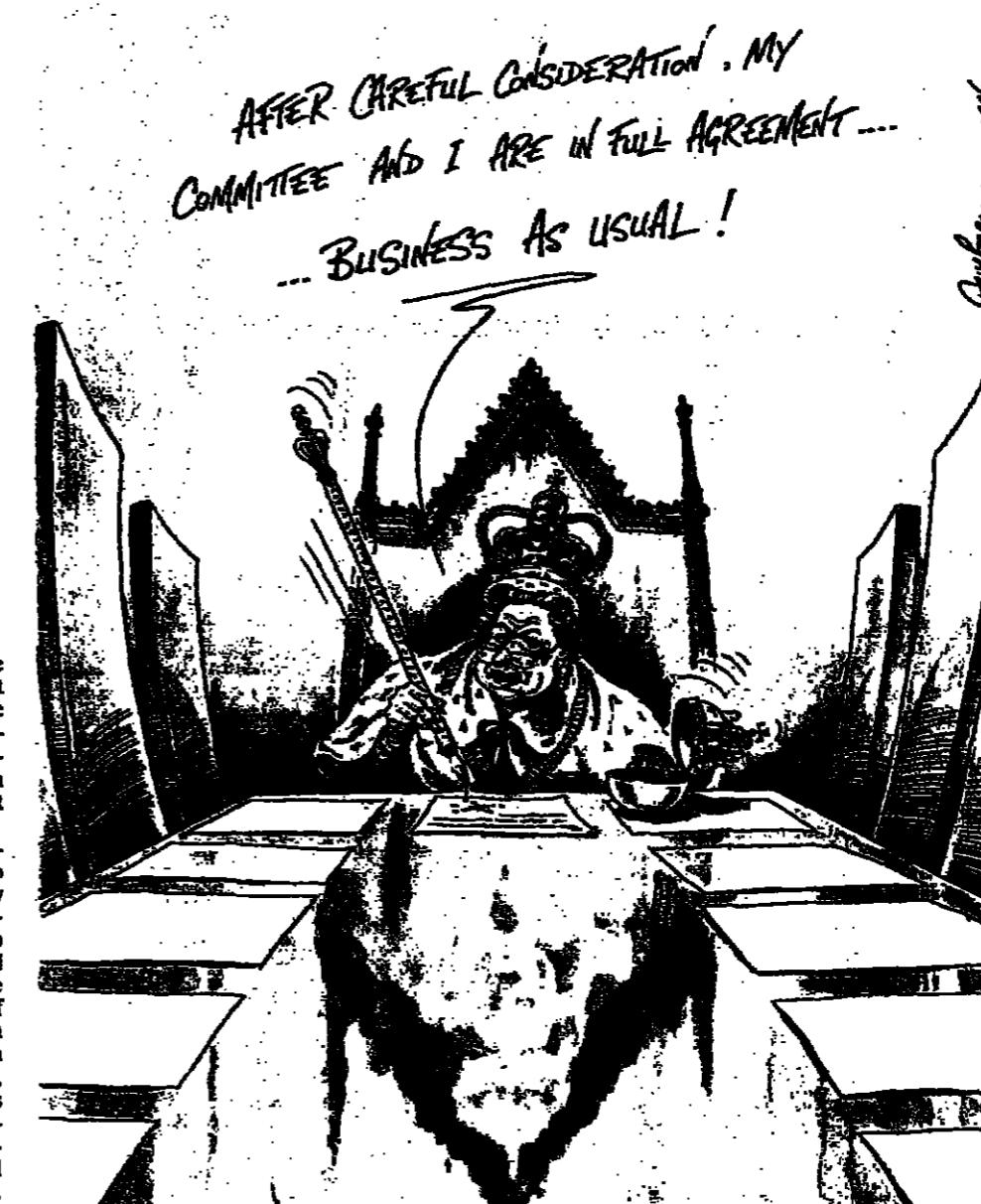
Today, the imperial system that made and possessed the monarchy is not even allowed to debate the monarchy, supposedly on the grounds that it is the Queen's own court? This is the real issue of sovereignty, not this or that reform of the rules defining the Royal Family, but how we decide how the rules are changed.

It matters for Ministers, as they exploit prerogative powers, now that the informed constraints of consensus politics have been broken. A Toy leak seems to have inspired Saturday's *Express* story, sensationalised headline: "The Queen's secret inquiry into Labour". This revealed that her private

secretary, Sir Robert Fellowes, is conducting discreet interviews to consider the effect on the monarchy of Lords reform, while its editorial proclaimed:

"The British constitution is a... delicate edifice... tamper with several parts of it... as Labour intends... and you may unwittingly unravel the whole thing."

Her Majesty is being enlisted to preserve us from decentralisation, a modern Scottish parliament and a Freedom of Information Act. If the monarchy collaborates with this approach, however surreptitiously, it could indeed help John Major win in 1997.



As the empire has shrunk away, the monarchy has been inflated. So that it has now become a substitute for the constitutional order. This is an untenable travesty of tradition, one increasingly incompatible with modern democracy. And it is exploited worst of all by the Government.

The personal tension is best illustrated by the proposal that the heir to the throne should be allowed to marry a Catholic. Were Charles just a member of a family, if royalty belonged to themselves, then whom they married would be a private affair. But the hereditary head of the Church of England cannot be free to marry a Catholic. Personal, private freedom for Royals means disestablishment, both literally, as far as the Church is concerned, and more widely. If, however, the Royals sitting as a committee decide to de-couple Church and Crown, this too would be an outrage. For it should not be a closed, family decision. It may be the right one, but it has to be a shared one.

But how can it be shared when Parliament is not even allowed to debate the monarchy, supposedly on the grounds that it is the Queen's own court? This is the real issue of sovereignty, not this or that reform of the rules defining the Royal Family, but how we decide how the rules are changed.

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But such a short-term reprieve is likely to precipitate a constitutional endgame from which it is inconceivable that the Crown will emerge unscathed. Ironically, it is in the monarchy's interests also that we move away from Lord Blake's talk. Sir Robert's discreet soundings and Tory scaremongering. As well as ours. For until the monarchy can be properly debated it will be hard to describe ourselves as a democracy.

The writer is the editor of "Power and the Throne" (Vintage, 1995).

THE CENTRAL FACTS FROM THE COURSES YOU ALWAYS MEANT TO TAKE, IN 25 LECTURES

He made quite a spectacle, the outsider with the strange, short clothes, tagging along in the high African grass, repeating his exasperated questions to the men hurrying to their midday chicken oracle. It was wrong to think that they were primitive or foolish, of course – all those commemorative rituals at his public school for the massed slaughter of the recent First World War had shown up that presumption – but what they had told him of their society was certainly not making his task any easier.

It seemed a world expressly designed by lunatics. Everyone believed there were witches around, and that to find out if someone else was bewitching you, you needed to feed poison to a chicken while going through the name of possible suspects, and when the chicken fell over dead, you knew who it was.

Edward Evans-Pritchard pushed along to catch up with these men he'd come to like, and helped them set out the nervously flapping fowls in the growing heat. It still seemed impossible, though, for poisoned chickens yet another researcher said, then think of the cows as mobile petrochemical factories, supplying useful cooking fuel and fertiliser.

What if the whole thing was just a way of channelling a small community's tensions? It



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VISITING LECTURER: David Bodanis

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Not everything evolved so neatly, but in moderation you get a powerful new imaging scope, which is increasingly tempting to turn back on to the society left behind. In one possible view, Parliament is opened when an elderly human wearing dead animal furs and with a pile of stones balanced on her head publicly waggles her vocal cords. In another, though, Elizabeth Windsor is a crucial force for stability, allowing even individuals who disagree with an elected government to stay united. Along with the time-stiffened boxes of the class system, her country will avoid the terrified social uncertainties that lead to witchcraft charges, as in early 1950s America, or its PC-chauvinist today.

Claude Lévi-Strauss hunted different harmonies in a different fashion, starting from the way villages avoid dividing into separate factions – often by simply having strict rules against marrying within a faction. Identified young brides or grooms end up being flung into distant groups, which may not be the greatest of pleasures for the new couples, but has the effect of neatly stitching the entire mass of factions together – at least till their children grow up, isolated in the new factions, and the elaborate stitching needs to be re-

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Gas plan poses 'risk to safety'

CHRIS GODSMARK
Political Correspondent

The UK's gas industry has dropped its long-standing concern that customers could be compelled to contribute to the costs of new pipelines by those taking the energy out of old ones.

With just a day to go, the politicians at the finale of the price formula debate may well conclude that it can be made sustainable. Health and Safety say that the measures do not threaten safety or health.

The news is a long-awaited victory for those who want to continue the market-oriented dialogue with the oil companies and a good omen.

Other key proposals from the Association of Shippers have been rejected.

But there has been a set of changes to the rules of play, and what was once a major sticking point has now been resolved.

It is not clear whether the government will accept all of the changes, but the outcome is likely to be a deal that is acceptable to both sides.

It is not clear whether the government will accept all of the changes, but the outcome is likely to be a deal that is acceptable to both sides.



COMMENT

Dismal decline in year of export-led recovery

It is easy to see why Japan's share of world export markets in manufactured goods should have fallen last year. 1995 was the year when the yen climbed into the stratosphere; even the most supercharged of industrial mountaineers would have found it hard to survive for long in the rarified atmosphere occupied by the yen at that time. It is equally easy to see why France, still clinging to its ill-conceived *franc fort* policy, should also be suffering. Harder to explain is how Germany managed to increase its share and in the process regain its position as second largest exporter; the German mark was also a strong currency in 1995.

But hardest to explain of all – except in anything but the most disturbing terms – is why Britain should have seen its relative share of world trade in continued decline. This, you will recall, was meant to be the year of the export-led recovery. It was the year when the currency advantage obtained by leaving the ERM should have been making British exports significantly more competitive in world markets. And it was the year in which British manufacturing was meant to be rediscovering its pride, showing the rest of Europe the way in terms of productivity and innovation.

If figures from the Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry are to be believed, the good news story being put about by ministers and industrialists is a long way from the truth. Indeed it seems to be little more than wishful thinking. No com-

parable analysis of world export performance is produced in Britain (now why do you think that is?) and the integrity and accuracy of the German survey is obviously open to question.

All the same, the picture it paints is probably about right. There is no reason to believe the figures have been distorted. Britain's biggest failing, judging by the breakdown, has been in the high growth economies of Asia. Again there is no obvious explanation for this; Britain's historic and cultural links with Asia should have given its exporters a natural advantage.

Furthermore, Britain's dismal showing in these markets (our share over the last 10 years has fallen from 3.3 per cent to 2.2 per cent) rather gives the lie to those Eurosceptics who naively believe Britain could make its way outside Europe by strengthening trading links with the Far East and the Americas.

We are already doing badly in the Far East even with the bridgehead into Europe our islands offer by way of return. Cast aside from Europe, there is every reason to believe our performance would be even worse.

The German figures fail to take account of Britain's still impressive performance in financial and business services – invisibles. Here our showing is still a respectable one. But as exporters of things that ordinary people can understand, we are on the road to oblivion. If we cannot hold our own even in

the world's strongest growth markets, where on earth are we going to succeed? Mars? Time for some serious soul searching.

Small comfort at Chamberlain Phipps

All those new found concerns over AIM, Oflex and other matched bargain markets in high risk companies that nobody has ever heard of, has made us forget that the real money is still lost on the main exchange with all its safeguards, listing requirements and high voltage investor protection rules.

It is hard to imagine a more scandalous example of this than Chamberlain Phipps, for this was a company floated on the stock market just two years ago. To call in receivers just a year after the company reported record results and awarded its chairman a controversial performance bonus that doubled his salary, makes it seem doubly worse.

The biggest questions must be asked of the company's advisers, HSBC Samuel Montagu and Credit Lyonnais Laing, for it was their stamp of approval that allowed the company to float.

The latter, as house broker, recommended buying the shares at 163p only a year ago. They were suspended yesterday at 11p but, with debts of £34m hanging around the shoe makers neck, they are worthless. Rarely has cobbblers been a more appropriate description of a company. It will come as cold com-

fort to shareholders but the warning signs were flashing bright red at Chamberlain right from the word go. Shareholders who allowed the company to thumb its nose at a string of corporate governance guidelines have only themselves to blame for the loss of their investment.

Why, they might have asked themselves at the time, was Dan Sullivan, an American venture capitalist with a fat from flawless record, allowed to combine the roles of chairman and chief executive, leaving unchecked the ambitious expansion plans that ultimately left the company drowning in debt? Worse, why was he allowed to sit at the head of a remuneration committee that concocted the bonus scheme from hell and had it waved through by unquestioning investors. The one comfort shareholders can glean from this sorry episode is that Mr Sullivan did at least put his money where his mouth was. His 25 per cent stake, now a quarter of nothing at all, was worth the best part of £20m a year ago.

Calling time on the electricity companies

Electricity is slippery stuff. You cannot warehouse it and you cannot forecast its price more than 24 hours in advance. Now it appears that you may not be able to buy it from a supplier of your choice quite as soon as promised either. The 12 regional electric-

ity companies are wizards when it comes to staring into their crystal balls and devising long term share option and incentive schemes guaranteed to deliver riches beyond most people's wildest dreams. It appears, however, that eight years is not long enough for them to prepare for the opening up of the domestic market to full competition. This is due to happen on 1 April 1998. But the RECs are now asking for another 18 months while competition is phased in.

When the financial markets were liberalised a decade ago, it was called Big Bang. RECs call their own forthcoming shakeup "the Cliff Face", a term which refers to the climb from cosy monopoly one day to competitors in a fully liberalised market the next. Now they seem to have got vertigo before they have even begun the ascent. Granted the scale of the change is daunting. Writing a computer program that will allow 25 million domestic customers to shop around for a commodity whose price changes every half hour of the day is hardly a breeze.

But the regulator, Professor Stephen Littlechild rightly comes back to the fact that the industry has known about the impending change since 1990. If the RECs need time to phase in competition, it should end, not start, in April 1998. The new public electricity supply licences Prof Littlechild has framed in readiness for that day give him the power to penalise those RECs which delay. He should use it, even if it means pushing one or two over the cliff edge.

Britain's share of world trade falls to all-time low

ELISABETH KLEIN

Britain's share of world trade in manufactured goods has been falling steadily for ten years reaching an all time low of just 4.7 per cent last year, according to a survey from the influential Association of German Chambers of Industries and Commerce.

By contrast, in 1985 Britain's share was 5.6 per cent.

The survey shows that Britain broadly maintained its position in the European and North American markets, with 7.3 per cent 3.4 per cent, respectively.

But our share of export markets in Asia has plummeted, from 3.3 per cent ten years ago to only 2.2 per cent last year.

The UK is among the few western countries whose export shares in the Asian market have become weaker than in the mid 80s.

"While countries like Italy, France or Germany increased their shares in Asia, the British failed. The feeble performance of British companies in Asia is the main reason for the loss of market share in world trade," said Guenter Lambertz, the

German economist who conducted the survey.

"This is a dangerous situation for Britain because Asia is and will be the fastest growing market of the world."

The world's leading export country is still the USA with an increased share of world trade of 16.4 per cent in 1995, compared to 16.1 per cent the year before.

With 10.8 per cent of world markets, Germany regained second place, narrowly pushing Japan out of the number two position. Japan's share was down 0.1 per cent to 10.5 per cent.

The strong showing by the US is attributed to a better performance in other North American markets.

Mr. Lambertz said that the US share of trade within North America had increased since the North American Free Trade Agreement – which brought down tariff barriers between Canada, the US and Mexico – came into force in 1995. This in turn was reflected in the figures showing an increased US share of world trade.

Typically, Germany appears far from happy with its performance.

Mr. Lambertz said: "Our success in export markets shouldn't be overstated. German companies can only be competitive if they keep on rationalizing and increase the amount of imported cheaper semi-finished products."

relative to the US-Dollar, caused a fall in Japan's share of world markets, the high priced German mark seems to have had little effect on German export performance.

"German companies were able to pass higher prices on to their customers and as a result they increased their market share by value."

"But we expect that on a medium-term perspective foreign clients will reduce their orders," Mr. Lambertz said.

The Association explains that the increased export share of Germany in Asia, up to 4.8 per cent from 4.3 per cent in 1985, is the main reason for its strong performance worldwide. There was also strong demand for capital goods, where German companies are the leading suppliers.

Typically, Germany appears far from happy with its performance.

Mr. Lambertz said: "Our success in export markets shouldn't be overstated. German companies can only be competitive if they keep on rationalizing and increase the amount of imported cheaper semi-finished products."

Global export league: percentage shares of world trade

	1986	1989	1992	1993	1994	1995
United States						
World	14.3	14.9	14.2	15.8	16.1	16.4
Europe	6.8	7.6	7.2	7.6	7.5	7.2
North America	68.6	65.3	65.2	67.0	67.6	75.0
Latin America	34.9	39.4	41.5	45.2	43.4	42.9
Asia	19.4	19.6	17.7	17.6	16.9	16.9
Germany						
World	12.9	12.6	12.6	11.1	10.6	10.8
Europe	20.9	21.0	20.8	19.6	19.1	19.8
North America	6.0	4.7	4.8	4.4	4.3	4.4
Latin America	7.3	7.1	6.3	5.4	5.5	5.4
Asia	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.3	4.6	4.8
Japan						
World	10.9	10.2	10.0	10.4	10.6	10.5
Europe	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.6	4.2	4.2
North America	19.7	17.2	16.2	16.2	15.6	14.1
Latin America	6.2	6.1	6.6	6.3	6.7	5.8
Asia	24.7	23.3	21.9	22.0	22.0	22.0
France						
World	6.1	6.2	6.5	5.9	5.6	5.4
Europe	9.7	10.2	10.6	10.2	10.2	9.9
North America	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.1
Latin America	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.5	2.9	2.4
Asia	1.8	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.8	2.0
United Kingdom						
World	5.6	5.2	5.3	5.0	4.9	4.7
Europe	7.2	7.0	7.4	7.3	7.4	7.3
North America	4.3	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.4
Latin America	2.5	2.3	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5
Asia	3.3	2.9	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.2
China						
World	—	—	3.7	4.4	4.6	4.6
Europe	—	—	1.3	1.8	1.7	1.6
North America	—	—	4.2	4.8	5.1	5.4
Latin America	—	—	0.8	0.8	1.2	1.5
Asia	—	—	10.3	10.8	11.4	11.0
Italy						
World	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.4	4.3	4.2
Europe	7.2	7.5	7.6	6.9	7.0	7.0
North America	2.6	2.3	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.1
Latin America	2.1	2.9	3.1	2.9	3.3	3.2
Asia	1.4	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.9

Source: Association of German Chambers of Commerce and Industry

Argos unveils £500m war chest

MAGNUS GRIMOND

Argos, the catalogue retailer, yesterday revealed a war chest of up to £500m to spend on acquisitions.

Mr. Smith said the four areas of their acquisition search were toys, consumer electronics, housewares and jewellery. "We have looked at them, evaluated them and made approaches where we were able to do so, but either prices did not match what we were prepared to pay or the businesses weren't for sale... It could be a long courtship."

Mike Smith, chief executive, said: "We have looked at [Signet] because it's a business which fits into our competencies. We are looking at businesses

where we are already significant and have knowledge of the supply base and the management."

Argos stressed that many of the companies it has looked at were well under the overall limit of its spending power, which would take gearing to around 100 per cent, and emphasised it was not talking to anyone at present.

The comments came as Argos revealed a cash mountain of £103m in June, despite the £127m special dividend, worth 42p a share, paid to shareholders in May. Pre-tax profits

Strong debut for EMI after Thorn split

MATHEW HORSMAN
Media Editor

EMI Group, the music arm of the former Thorn-EMI conglomerate, remained a favoured takeover candidate, following its maiden day of trading on a separately quoted company.

Its shares jumped 37.5p to £14.60,

business

Argos prospers without the glitz

THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY TOM STEVENSON

Argos is a group which appears to defy normal retailing logic. Echewing the prime locations and glitzy presentation which others regard as essential to success on the high street, the catalogue showroom operation has prospered in the austerity of the 1990s.

Argos would claim that its recent success has less to do with the current retail environment and more with its own efforts. Yesterday's 45 per cent rise in interim profits to £31.8m was fuelled by like-for-like growth through the stores of 11 per cent. That is only just over half the growth rate typically returned by the group in the heady days of the 1980s and Mike Smith, chief executive, would say only around 2 percentage points of the latest figure relates to revised consumer confidence.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the group's deceptively simple plan to set the pricing agenda on the high street, while expanding its range, has struck a chord with consumers. The group has held or cut the price of around 70 per cent of its lines and yet still managed a modest 0.4 per cent gross margin gain in the first half. Argos freely admits that much of this is down to one-off factors such as abnormally low stock levels last winter and exchange benefits. In a more normal year, it would expect to see margin erosion of nearer 0.1 per cent, but through mix gains and direct buying from overseas, hopes it should be no worse than that on average.

But management of austerity extends beyond gross margins at Argos. High operational gearing and iron control of costs helped translate the 18 per cent rise in first-half sales into a 64 per cent rise in operating profits, which came in at £25.5m.

With typical caution, the group yesterday offered a series of reasons why the all-important second half might be tricky, including bearing an extra £1m for catalogue costs due to higher paper prices and increased competition from rivals. Even so, analysts were busy tipping forecasts yesterday on the promising sales figures with Barclays de Zoete Wedd now looking for £150m.

With scope to raise the number of domestic stores by up to 50 per cent from the 404 expected to be in place by the year end, there is still plenty to go for in the core business. The only worry is what happens with diversifications. It is early days, but this year's first move overseas, to Ireland, seems to have gone well. The move to the Netherlands, where Argos sees the potential for 70 stores, will involve more risk.

A departure into mainstream retailing would be more serious. The acquisition of Signet, the jewellery chain, seems to be off the agenda, but with

firepower of up to £500m, Argos has the scope for a large mistake.

With that in mind, the shares, up 14p at 757p, look high enough on a forward p/e of 22.

Page recruits profits overseas

Recruitment consultancy is if anything more operationally geared than the catalogue retailing Argos specialises in. With a largely fixed overhead base, even quite modest rises in the numbers of successful placements can have a dramatic impact on profits. No surprise then that an unexpected 45 per cent rise in permanent jobs and 25 per cent increase in temps at Michael Page in the half year to June led to soaring profits and a big jump in the share price yesterday.

Interim profits emerged from those benevolent trading conditions 79 per cent higher at £14m. Earnings per share were 74 per cent better at 14.28p and the dividend was all but doubled at 2p (1.1p). Encouragingly, the cash pile at

the end of the half year was a better-than-expected £29.9m and analysts believe it will be closer to £37m by December.

Analysts had pencilled in profits closer to £11m for the six months so it was again no surprise that the share price should jump 25p to 345p yesterday. At that level, they have already risen more than 10 fold since the 33p low point reached at the end of 1993.

Highlights of the period were buoyant City recruitment with significantly better permanent and contract business pushing profits 70 per cent higher. Accountancy was strong, but the real success story has been Page's push overseas where France and the Netherlands are booming and Australia achieved record profits, up 86 per cent.

The successful creation of a genuinely international portfolio of businesses is important because it will provide Page with some protection when the chill winds of recession start blowing again.

The disadvantage of being geared to an upturn is that you tend to be equally geared to a decline in the event of a downturn.

On the basis of house broker BZW's forecasts for this year and next of £28m

profits rising to £32m, the shares stand on a prospective price/earnings ratio of 12, falling to 10. Even if you adopt the prudent approach of attaching a discount to the shares to cover the inevitable cyclical dip in earnings, the cushion of the cash in the bank and the geographical spread mean the shares still have a little way to go. But only a little – most of the good news is now in price.

Wace presents a triple whammy

There appears to be a jinx on Wace, the printing and packaging group. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Wace was dogged by problems culminating in a series of profit warnings. Recent events suggest history is about to repeat itself. Since March, when they hit a high of 279p, the shares have been falling steadily on the back of a warnings over margins and then in May over profits.

The triple whammy was delivered yesterday by news that pre-tax profits have crashed from £10m to £4.21m in the six months to June. Earnings per share have slumped from 7.3p to 1.4p, not quite enough to cover an unchanged interim dividend of 1.85p. The shares accordingly slid 15p to 152p.

The merger of Wace's existing wine and spirit labelling operations with those of Ferry Pickering, a maker of specialist packaging acquired for £26m last year, was always going to be expensive, but the market was wrong-footed by the £3.2m exceptional unveiled yesterday, which comes on top of a £500,000 loss on the closure of the US plant.

More serious was the performance of the UK businesses. Excluding acquisitions, printing profits slid from £5.2m to £5.5m in the half, hit by the restocking flagged by the company earlier in the year and hefty competition, exacerbated by desperate rivals on the brink of collapse. Meanwhile, imaging, the process of transforming images and words into a form in which they can be printed, crashed from £2.2m to just £300,000 as a large customer slashed his business with Wace.

The figures would have been worse, but for £300,000 profits from Ferry Pickering and Hallmark's Irish greeting card plant, also acquired last year.

Chief executive Trevor Grice has been feted by the City for turning the group round, but with profits unlikely to top £17m this year, his stock has (literally) taken a tumble. A forward multiple of 14 and gearing of 67 per cent suggest investors should exercise caution.

Argos may be storming ahead on the high street but it is still struggling to make its mark on the Internet. The catalogue retailer has sold just 35 items via the World Wide Web in 18 months of trying. At an average price tag of £15, that means total cyber-sales of just £500 against costs that must run into tens of thousands. Chief executive Mike Smith, who is never most the most garrulous of people, has yet to be convinced that the whole Internet-malarkey is all what it's cracked up to be. He describes progress as "slow".

Ever optimistic the London Docklands Development Corporation is attempting to turn a barren stretch of land into a cultural centre. Trinity Buoy Wharf, currently home to a few sheds and a warehouse, is being "re-positioned" in property developer speak as a "cultural quarter".

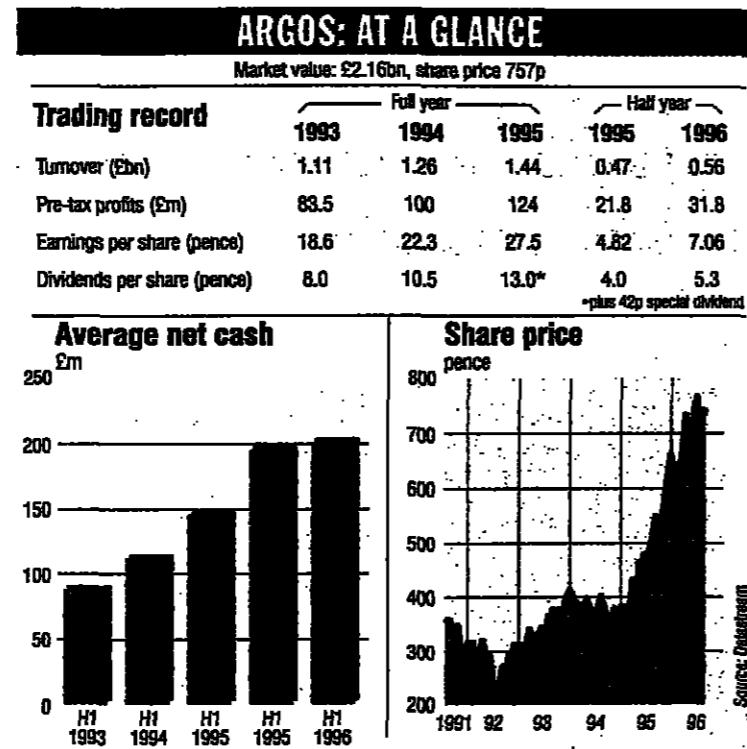
The idea is to transform

the wharf by attracting

artists, crafts people and other

trendies. A tricky assignment

for the marketing men, this one. Though the build-



The inflated cost of the millennium party

CITY DIARY

NIGEL COPE



A forward-thinking hotel in County Durham is taking a punt on inflation rising steeply over the next few years. The Redworth Hotel and Country Club near Darlington has started selling "end of the millennium" party tickets for 31 December 1999.

The price:

for two people

for two nights

and plenty of

entertainment

in is,

appropriately, £999.99. The current price is £600. Surely

they are not banking on

inflation rising at more than

50 per cent over the next three

and a bit years?

"We've taken inflation into account but the price also includes lots of entertainment, a jazz band and a crystal gift to commemorate the event, which are not included in our usual price."

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Chief executive Trevor Grice has been feted by the City for turning the group round, but with profits unlikely to top £17m this year, his stock has (literally) taken a tumble. A forward multiple of 14 and gearing of 67 per cent suggest investors should exercise caution.

Argos may be storming ahead on the high street but it is still struggling to make its mark on the Internet. The catalogue retailer has sold just 35 items via the World Wide Web in 18 months of trying. At an average price tag of £15, that means total cyber-sales of just £500 against costs that must run into tens of thousands. Chief executive Mike Smith, who is never most the most garrulous of people, has yet to be convinced that the whole Internet-malarkey is all what it's cracked up to be. He describes progress as "slow".

The merger of Wace's existing wine and spirit labelling operations with those of Ferry Pickering, a maker of specialist packaging acquired for £

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Land-Rover owners in revolt at quality defects

Land-Rover owners are in revolt at a succession of "horrendous" quality defects on the four-wheel drive vehicles which Rover's German owner, BMW, is said to have labelled a disgrace.

The catalogue of problems was highlighted in the latest influential JD Power, which placed Land-Rover bottom out of 37 manufacturers. BMW was said to have "gone ballistic" at the survey statistics and has drafted in extra engineers and quality controllers at the Solihull plant near Birmingham to sort matters out. Worst of all, the top of the range model, the £50,000 Range Rover, is gaining a reputation for unreliability.

Critics of Rover suggest this difficulties are part of a wider malaise. They come as BMW is grappling to turn the loss-making company round, pouring in £500m a year in investment. The Germans are said to be desperate not to suffer the same problems with Rover that Ford had when it acquired Jaguar.

Land-Rover dealers are understandably reluctant about speaking out at the quality problems, but the head of one dealership who did not want to be named, said: "I'm afraid we can only confirm the horrendous reliability problems. We're trying to be loyal because it is a British make, but it is not a good situation. The only bright thing about it is that it makes lots of after-sales warranty work for us."

Warwick Banks, who runs a business modifying Land-Rovers, is one owner who has complained endlessly at the defects in his Discovery model. "There's no question about it. This is by far the worst vehicle I have ever had. It started with a noisy gearbox, but then I found the

The fabled off-roader has now plunged to bottom of the reliability league tables as Chris Godsmark reports

front suspension was lopsided and the car veered to the left all the time. The windscreen has fallen out three times and the car leaks oil constantly," he said.

The high profile Range Rover, launched in a blaze of publicity at the UK's most exclusive country house hotel, Cliveden, has been recalled twice in its short life, the first time because of suspected air conditioning faults, the second because of problems with the rear suspension.

One owner of a two year old Range Rover, who runs a manufac-

turing company in the Midlands, said: "This is the third Range Rover I've had and stupid things seem to go wrong constantly. The central locking plays up all the time, the front wheels seem to wobble when I go round bends, I don't think it's ever been in for a service - without any aspects of the way the company operates. Equally, British insiders at Rover say much the same thing about their German counterparts, claiming BMW makes agreements, only to break them the next day."

A more fundamental cause of the difficulties at Solihull appears to be the way managers there have coped with expansion. A recent report by brokers Salomon Brothers on the

European motor industry said Rover had "some of the worst production economics in the industry".

Production is on course to have almost doubled in the past four years. In 1993 Land-Rover made 68,159 vehicles, by 1995 production had soared to 127,287. In the first seven months of 1996 it was up a further 6 per cent. The growth is not confined to the Discovery or new Range Rover. Even the traditional "workhorse" Land-Rover which launched the marque has seen dramatic sales increases - appealing to buyers who will probably never use them for off-road work. Yet according to Professor Gareth Rhys OBE, from Cardiff Business School, Solihull still has vast spare capacity. For BMW, a question mark hangs over whether this can effectively be used.

Professor Rhys said: "BMW has clearly taken a great interest in Land-Rover and has apparently not liked everything it has seen. It has gradually been taking more and more control. The alarm bells have suddenly rung because there are just too many failings on Land-Rover vehicles."

Worryingly for BMW demand for four wheel drive vehicles, which rose so sharply during the late 1980s and early 1990s, appears to be tailing off. At the same time buyers are becoming more quality-conscious as the number of rivals from the US and the Far East continues to grow.

Meanwhile investment at Solihull will run into hundreds of millions of pounds, some of it for a new body shop, but much of it being ploughed into quality control. Some dealers insist the quality picture is mixed, with customers still generally satisfied. But according to one, "at least when you're at the bottom of a survey like JD Power, the only way is up".

'At least when you're at the bottom, the only way to go is up'



Range Rovers: Beset by increasing quality problems at Solihull

Photograph: UPPA

Foreign Exchange Rates

Country	Sterling	Dollar	D-Mark
US	15.65	6.4	15.10
Canada	2.225	5.07	1.740
Germany	2.500	4.47	10.10
France	1.207	12.10	1.402
Italy	2.243	4.83	1.25
Japan	165.84	7.50	12.25
ECU	1.211	5.11	1.40
Belgium	4.284	12.7	2.25
Netherlands	8.893	15.18	2.25
Netherlands	2.571	65.57	1.74
Ireland	0.926	7.3	2.14
Norway	9.942	20.50	3.10
Spain	14.65	21.31	5.95
Sweden	1.120	0.6	1.6
Australia*	1.652	4.46	1.32
Hong Kong	1.753	10.11	2.25
Malta	3.624	0.0	0.26
New Zealand	2.244	43.57	1.35
Saudi Arabia	2.763	0.0	0.30
Singapore	2.792	0.0	0.40

Years indicated in local rates.

Yield %

10yr

yield %

YORK EBOR MEETING: The opening day brings an opportunity for a hardy turf campaigner to establish a popular front

Halling running for a second term at the top

Halling would make a poor politician. The chestnut who has already retained his Eclipse Stakes crown attempts to complete the double-double at York this afternoon with success in a second consecutive International Stakes. Yet it seems Godolphin's five-year-old has developed the vote-losing tendency of being remembered for his worst moments.

Halling, like Godolphin itself, has perhaps not received due recognition. When his name is brought up by those with beer froth on their upper lip it is inevitably linked with defeats at the hands of the American equine colossus, Cigar, both at the Breeders' Cup in New York last autumn and in this spring's Dubai World Cup.

It should be pointed out that both those reverses were on dirt, a surface which Godolphin now realises does not suit Halling. This should not detract from the horse, as the sport is replete with animals who can perform with much greater facility on either grass or dirt. Cigar himself was close to nondescript on turf, while a small example from this country is Clive Brittan's Master Fire Eyes, who is rated 95 on his all-weather form but whose grass performances suggest he is a two stones and more inferior performer in that sphere.

Halling himself has won his last seven starts on turf and will be favourite this afternoon on the Knavemire to extend that sequence. The opposition, which includes First Island, Bijou D'Inde and Grap Tree Road, will hardly be throwing petals in the chestnut's path to herald his coronation, but there

Richard Edmondson on the Godolphin runner with International ambitions

is a feeling in the Halling camp that he will not surrender lightly. "It's an awful lot to ask of him, but he has been campaigned with this specially in mind," Sir Simon Crispford, Godolphin's racing manager, said.

As long as he does not disgrace himself on the Knavemire, Halling will then be asked to contest races such as the Champion Stakes and possibly

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Royal Court
(York 3.45)
NB: Marl
(York 4.15)

the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe for his Arab owners.

That Godolphin achieves success should be no surprise. They hardly select animals from the mink depot. In addition, the blue-bedevilled animals they gather receive the sort of winter pampering that the rich treat themselves to in St Moritz. What is arresting, however, is the frequency of triumphs within the organisation.

It was said last year that the nominal assistant, Jeremy Noseda, was the trainer in all but name and that Saeed bin Suroor, the team's designated trainer, was little more than a good operator with a chummy on Sheikh Mohammed's fleet of vehicles. Noseda, though, has long since loaded up his truck and gone to California, and his replacement, Bill Mott's former assistant, Tom Albertrani, has

who have contributed towards a 28 per cent strike-rate and a worldwide £1.8m in prize-money. Do not stay awake tonight with worries for Sheikh Mohammed.

Dubai's crown prince still considers the Godolphin experiment to be in its infancy, and fit and sleek horses from the Emirates will be arriving on these shores for many springs to come.

If there is to be a tinkering within the system it will come in the equine staffing of Godolphin. Sheikh Mohammed considers his finest moment in racing to be the Derby victory of Lammarr, who was bred by his family in America and nurtured by his team in the Gulf. He would like to relive that cradle-to-expedition experience. "We're concentrating more on home-bred yearlings now," Crispford said. "I'm sure we will buy a few horses, but certainly not in the numbers that we've bought previously."

A different policy may be on the way, but Halling should show at York today that the results remain the same.

Tactics may decide 'race of the year'

"The best race of the year", is how Peter Chapple-Hyam yesterday described today's International Stakes, in which he sends out Spectrum to try and wrest the trophy from Halling.

Without a win since last year's Champion Stakes, Spectrum has shown signs at home that he is returning to form. "Spectrum is back to his best,"

Chapple-Hyam said, "but he will need to be, it looks the best race of the year."

"The horse will be suited by plenty of pace because he possibly needs a mile and a half now and if all goes well then he goes for the Arc."

In the Eclipse Stakes at Sandown last time it was Halling, closely followed

throughout by Bijou D'Inde, who set the pace, but Bijou D'Inde's trainer, Mark Johnston, was guarded yesterday as to whether similar forcing tactics will be adopted today by his three-year-old, who had been considered a doubtful stayer prior to the race.

"Jason [Weaver] will stop by after racing today to discuss how



Halling lets the bad memory of his dirt defeat wash over him

Photograph: Phil Smith/Sporting Life

Expectation of Snow

Ante-post punters on the Ebor, who had a setback with the withdrawal of the fancied Celeric at the weekend, may still have something to cheer in tomorrow's race as Ambassador and Snow Princess, who had both been considered doubtful, are now likely to run.

The Barry Hills-trained Ambassador will have Willie Carson

in the saddle, while Snow

Princess's trainer, Lord Huntingdon, who had been worried that underfoot conditions would be too firm for the filly, walked the course yesterday and was pleased with what he found.

Even Hailstone (4.1), a Harbour

Dale 7-3, Beauchamp 6-3, Ambleside,

10-1 Snow Princess & Cleverton, 12-1 Bet-

ter Offer, Corndon & Foundry Lane, 14-1 Top

Notch, 16-1 Shantou, 18-1 Hailstone, 20-1 Notch

Legend, 20-1 others

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sport

Wright bringing harmony to Wasps and QPR

Hard by the A40(M) flyover (Oxford in an hour), in the middle of the giant White City estate, bordered by roads named in the aftermath of the Boer War (South Africa, Bloemfontein, Mafeking), stands the dinky-dot little stadium of Queen's Park Rangers. Only the tall floodlight stems and the large logo distinguish it from some of the low level sixties housing in the area. Inside, where there is room for 19,000 fans to sit, the newest stands (nowhere much taller than a double-decker bus) crowd to the edge of the pitch, creating an intimacy rather like that of the recreated Shakespeare's Globe theatre in Southwark - and utterly unlike the vastnesses of Highbury or Old Trafford.

Everybody likes QPR. For years they have played nice football, without having the

temerity actually to win anything (save for one glorious League Cup back in 1967). Oh Mark Lazarus, Peter Springett, Frank Silbrey, where are you now? No, I don't really want to know, either). And it was here - despite being a Tottenham man - that I watched my first live match on New Year's Day 1973, when the Rangers gave Manchester United a 3-1 slapping. In all this time they have generally been thought of as London's fifth team (after West Ham, but before Palace - leaving Wimbledon out altogether). It hardly seems the place for a sports revolution.

But there are some strange things about this club. Among the list of the dozen or so companies holding executive boxes (Coopers and Lybrand have two, some outfit called MR Security has another two) are no

less than three music companies: Skidz Music, HMV UK and EMI records. For Rangers are for the music industry what Arsenal are for bold writers, Tottenham are for us Jews and Chelsea are for Conservative politicians.

So here we are, overlooking the pitch, to listen to the club chairman Chris Wright, (multi-millionaire music mogul, boss of Chrysalis, the man widely blamed for discovering Genesis), unveil his plans for his beloved Rangers. And what plans they are. Mr Wright has also bought Wasps Rugby Union Football Club (based in a suburb of London called Sudbury, which I have never visited) and merged the two sports operations in one - Loftus Road plc. This season 12 rugby matches will be played at the ground, within easy travelling

distance of central London. They include Wasps versus the Welsh champions, Cardiff, and a match against Toulouse. It is a unique proposition.

Its author is an archetype of the new breed. Branson-esque in appearance, he probably looks far smarter in Davy Crockett coat or Bermuda shorts, than he contrives to be in shirt and tie. He also sports the Sugar Yen-tob "beard" of successful 90-men, as worn by those who don't actually like beards, but aren't keen on their faces either. He is genial, understated, lacking in the enormous pomposity of the soccer chairman of old and immensely ambitious. He believes that Wasps and Rangers can be good for each

other; they will be promoted together, their sales operations merged, their fans encouraged into cross support. Season ticket holders at Loftus Road can come to a football match (or "show" as Mr Wright engagingly calls them) one week and watch Bristol or Bath the next. So, on Sunday 8 September, Saracens visit QPR and, if more than 5,000 or 6,000 turn up, Chris Wright will be vindicated. In the long term, if both teams were successful and support grew, then he might be looking at building a new stadium. This, as a senior executive put it to me, would be outside football-ground bespeckled London and "in the M40 corridor", somewhere in the under-served Western sprawl.

The Rugger lot, poor relations in every way, profess themselves ecstatic with the arrangement. Wasps' chief executive, Geoff Huckstep - who has clearly spent a whole productive season in the Coopers and Lybrand suite - is keen to "give an indication of some of the synergies", while accepting the need "in the fullness of time to evolve some corporate identity". Now, you never heard old farts talking like that, did you? Which is why old farts wouldn't have brought off the coup that Mr Huckstep has, that of signing up All-Black wingman, Vaike Ingamala, who has taken a real shine to the Loftus Road stadium. He will join Wasps next month after Wigan's season has finished and will return to Wigan for pre-season training early in 1997.

The one big problem with the deal is the pitch. Football needs

nice, flat, unruled surfaces, so that the best players on the continent can shrill and turn. Rugby players prefer a slushy mudpit, so that it hurts less when you're tackled. And the Rangers pitch, which they allow us to walk on, is a thing of beauty; it is such a lovely vibrant green, so soft, springy and earth-smelling, that I want to take it home with me and make mossy love to it. But won't Mr Ingamala and friends ruin it? Apparently not. Turf specialists have declared that the grass can cope. And we have 1,500 square metres of spare turf in identical condition in storage, should the need arise", says the Operations Director, Alan Hedges. Wheew.

As I make my way out of the Executive entrance, a sparkling navy blue Range Rover parks half on the pavement, and a tall brown man with gold shades brushes past. It is the former England striker Mark Hateley, every inch a modern sporting hero, dropping in to pick up some stuff from Ray, before going off to Leeds United on loan. In South Africa Road, with the rundown Springbok pub and the metal-grilled William Hills and the urchin in the QPR shirt. Hateley cuts an incongruous figure. He would look far more at home in the M40 corridor.

Holmes upbeat despite defeat

Paralympics

World records are continuing to tumble with alarming regularity at the Paralympic Games in Atlanta, and nowhere more so than in the pool.

Chris Holmes, the partially sighted Cambridge graduate who is a veteran of three Paralympic games and the most successful British competitor in Barcelona in 1992 with six gold medals and one silver in the water, began his campaign in the men's B2 200m medley, finishing second in 2min 23.84sec behind Australia's Kingsley Bulgarin, who recorded 2:22.45. Both men were inside the old record by almost five seconds.

Holmes, although not overly disappointed, believed with better funding he could have improved as dramatically as Bulgarin. He said: "The improvement we are seeing in the pool is amazing, but a lot of what we are seeing here symbolises the difference between Britain and the way other nations are pursuing their sport. Bulgarin has been getting £10,000 funding a year, paid by his state, which is bound to have an effect.

"However, this record has stood since 1984. I really felt that if I could go under it, I would win it. I did, and went under my personal best by five seconds, but when I get him on to the sprint freestyle, that is my territory."

Jody Cundy, a below-the-knee amputee, registered a new world record in the S10 100m butterfly with 1min 02.44sec. Giles Long also took gold in the 100m butterfly, but in the S8 category, while Tim Reddish claimed silver in the B2 200m medley. Tetraplegic Kenneth Cairns finished in the silver medal position behind Slovakia's Andrej Zatko in the men's S3 50m butterfly.

Zatko, with no arms to speak of and only three feet tall, powered away underwater at the start with Cairns never getting nearer than five metres to the Slovakian, who set another Paralympic record in 1min 11.23sec. Britain's standing volleyball team, made up of amputees, exited the competition on Sunday after losing to Israel. Defeats in straight sets by Germany and Slovakia left the Britons needing to defeat Israel to be sure of a quarter-final place, but they were narrowly beaten 3-2.

Mountain marathons are the toughest possible races over the hardest terrain. Rob Howard reports

Alpine runners reach the peak of endurance

From high on the slopes of Aonach Mor the lights of Fort William appeared far below through the rolling cloud which swept across the mountain. Only the flash of torchlights and low voices betrayed the presence of competitors in the Lowe Alpine Mountain Marathon, transported to this high campsite by the nearby ski gondola.

They entered knowing only that they would spend a weekend running somewhere in the Scottish mountains. They found that their competition area was a vast range of the highest and most desolate mountains in Britain, and that even before the race began their bed for the night was on boggy ground 2,000ft above sea level.

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windy and wet. Instead of factor 25, runners were applying midge repellent, and the only padding was across the fast flowing rivers and through bogs.

Saturday was spent on long climbs to heights over 3,000 feet and picking a way along rock strewn ridges, guided only by the compass. At the end of the day, runners arrived at the campsite at Luibelt with sodden feet after fording the nearby Abhainn Rath. This was not a campsite with the usual facilities. Luibelt is a mountain bothy, a rough shelter for walkers situated six miles from the nearest road. The tired competitors simply pitched their tents in the tussocks of marsh grass, lit their stoves and settled down for the night.

The tent containing Mel Owen and John Harvey was an unusual shape as Owen had left the tent poles behind, but they survived and won the veterans' prize in the 'C' course. Other veteran winners were Mary Gillespie, 61, and her husband Alex, who is still active in the local mountain rescue at 62. A regular mountain marathon runner, he lives in Fort William and said: "I doubt anyone in the town is aware of the race. It will come and go and won't have any impact on the landscape."

That was illustrated in the morning when the tented township disappeared, the runners repacked and set off towards the distant outline of Ben Nevis in better weather. Luibelt returned to its isolated splendour, and to help ensure this the competitors' rucksacks were checked for rubbish at the finish. Anyone not carrying out their litter was disqualified.

The winners of the elite class were Mark Seddon and Dan Parker, who covered about 60km in 10hr 31min. But every pair to finish had overcome the weather, the terrain and the cunning of the course planner.

Among them was Victoria Skelton, 17

and running a mountain marathon for the first time. She said: "It was a lot rougher than I expected with more rocks and almost no paths, which made descending much harder than climbing. I'm more used to the Lake District, which has paths everywhere and is far easier." Asked if she would compete again, she hesitated before answering: "Probably..."

Eddie Speak avoided that problem by flying his light plane to a nearby airfield, and Davie Mack had come by sea from the Hebridean isle of Jura.

A note in the gondola reminded travellers the mountain had an Arctic climate, and while most of the United Kingdom suffered a heatwave the mountains around Ben Nevis were cloud covered.



Ups and downs: A mountain marathon man plots a course across the mist-shrouded Nevis range

Photograph: Rob Howard

Japanese tourists go in search of credibility



Takeshi Hashimoto prepares for a struggle against Scotland in the Student World Cup
Photograph: Victoria Matthews

On Friday night, the Japanese student rugby league team delighted spectators at Warrington with their display of synchronised and ceremonial bowing.

Less than 24 hours later, they showed rather less cohesion in conceding 90 points to Scotland in their opening match in the Halifax Student Rugby League World Cup.

That is the quandary when the game goes exotic. On the one hand, the Japanese, snapping pictures of each other like any band of young tourists, are welcomed as colourful newcomers. On the field, with France to play tonight and England on Saturday, there is the danger of serious embarrassment, not to mention loss of face.

The other way of looking at it is to say that it is a miracle that they are here at all - and conceding as few as 90 points - because the code in Japan has had the bounciest of rides. Despite the gut feeling that the Japanese, with their lack of line-out jumpers and love of running the ball, are more naturally suited to rugby, it was proved difficult to convince him that, although he wouldn't actively help us, he wouldn't put

Dave Hadfield assesses the difficulties facing one of rugby league's new recruits

"We had 35 players at one session," said Mark Mannix, a former Sydney first-grade player whose mission in life this is. "Then they found out it was rugby league and the following week we had two. It has to do with Japanese society, where being part of the group is very important. If you step outside, you can be ostracised."

Even when Japan managed to field a side in the Sydney Sevens, they were disqualified for not being Japanese enough, when they fielded Mannix's younger brother, Greg. "It was racist pure and simple," he said. "These blokes are discriminated against already, so we don't need that sort of thing on top of it."

It was the partial conversion of the president of the previously hostile Japanese Rugby Union that has made life slightly easier for Mannix and his group. "He saw Wigan play Bath and came back saying that, although he wouldn't actively help us, he wouldn't put

barriers in our path either," said Ken Isaacs, another expatriate Australian, who played for Halifax in 1984/85 and is now Japan's team manager.

Mannix and Co needed that concession when they lost their sponsor a couple of weeks before the tour. That meant that a number of players were forced to drop out and, to make up their numbers, they held a session at Osaka University rugby union club, from which they filled up their empty places.

"We have been told that there will be no comeback against these players," Mannix said, "but we won't really know that until we get home."

It is what happens here that is of immediate concern, especially after that 90-6 hammering by the Scots. "Not only was it the first time many of them had played 13-a-side rugby, it was the first time that they had played on grass, against foreigners or in front of a crowd," Isaacs said. "The result doesn't show lack of

commitment, but just lack of knowledge and technique."

It was not surprising that the Japanese players should huddle around the play-the-ball in defence like a tour party around their guide's umbrella. "But I expect a hundred per cent improvement in our other two games," said Isaacs, who pays tribute to the Western Samoa team, who have unofficially adopted them.

The Samoans have been great. They have taken our blunders under their wing and given them a training session to help them work out what they need to do." Everyone, in fact, wants the Japanese to come through unscathed and with some pride intact. "Look at them," said one Scot as the clans from Tokyo and Osaka got to grips with a Highland Fling at the welcome barbecue for the competing teams last week.

"They can always do a copy that's better than the original," Isaacs hopes the talent for fast learning applies to picking up the rhythms of rugby league as well.

TODAY'S FIXTURES HALIFAX STUDENT WORLD CUP Pool C: England v Scotland (7.05) vs France; France v Japan (7.07) vs Italy

Wallabies hoping for England Test

Rugby Union

Australia are trying to add England to the fixture list for their European tour later this year and revive the tradition of playing a Grand Slam of tests against all four home nations.

Scotland, Ireland and Italy are already scheduled to host Tests against the Wallabies during their eight-week tour which starts on 15 October.

John O'Neill, chief executive of the Australian Rugby Union, said Wales had suggested adding a one-off test in Cardiff. "Now that we have three of the four Grand Slam countries, why wouldn't you maximise the value of the tour?" O'Neill said. "It makes sense, and I'm going to pursue it this week."

The Rugby Football Union said it would look at the possibility of a game if a formal application is received. "We have heard nothing as yet," a spokesman said. "The fixture schedule still stands. The Wales v Australia game is still to be confirmed and we will wait

until we hear something." Australia last played all the home nations on tour in 1984, when they won all four Tests.

If the tour changes are confirmed at an ARU board meeting tomorrow, Australia will play 12 Tests during 1996. The proposed move has already brought an angry response from the veteran winger David Campese, who fears the players' workload is becoming too heavy.

Before starting the Test programme in June, the Australian players represented their states in the Super 12 southern hemisphere provincial competition. "How many Tests do they want us to play?" asked Campese, who is to make his 100th international appearance on tour. "I think it's ridiculous. Don't they think we've had a hard enough season as it is? There's a chance they're going to overdo it."

The centre Tim Horan welcomed the prospect of playing all four home nations, but shared Campese's concern about the physical effects. "You have to be aware of the toll it would take on the players," Horan said.

sport

ORTS

trip on which he defected with his family, said he arrived in the town in which they were based, and leaders of West Lancashire, Liverpool, and the local John and William Hills' Open shot. Incongruous looks far more 40 years.

Athletics

Christie still ready to run for Britain

SIMON TURNBULL
reports from Gateshead

Linford Christie produced his second volte-face of the summer here last night with the announcement that his 63rd appearance for Great Britain, in the Bupa Challenge meeting, might not, after all, be his last.

"I will be running in the European Cup if I am selected next year," was his unexpected announcement to those who had gathered to witness his supposed farewell international appearance.

It was by the banks of the Tyne that Linford Christie took the first stammering steps that were to lead him to fame, and not a little fortune, in the international fast lane.

Seventeen years after his baptism in the international athletics arena, as a gangling teenager in the Amoco Games, Britain's most bemuddled athlete returned to Gateshead Stadium for what was to have been his last hurrah in the vest of his adopted country.

Few in the 10,000 crowd would have recalled the 19-year-old Thames Valley Harrier who was given his first big break in that 1979 Gateshead meeting after finishing runner-up to Phil Brown in the senior 200 metres race at the English Schools' Championships in Nottingham. Christie finished sixth in his 100m heat at 10.11sec, an anonymous young also-ran in the slipstream of Allan Wells.

Last night, at the age of 36, Christie, still the reigning European and Commonwealth champion at 100m, opened his night's work in the match billed as a meeting between Great Britain and an international select team by revisiting the event which earned him his first invitation to top-level competition.

He looked like recording his 52nd win for Britain, too, as he rounded the bend marginally in front of John Regis. "I didn't have a good start. I can accelerate more from 30 to 70 metres. And I can relax better from 70 to the finish." It could hardly have been a consoling thought for Christie.

Bailey himself has not yet taken part in the homecoming welcome Canada has been waiting to extend to an Olympic 100m champion since 1928. "I haven't been back to Canada since the Olympics," Bailey revealed. "I know it'll be hectic when I get back and I need to concentrate on training for the Grand Prix races I've got left this season. I've still got work to do."

Pan of Bailey's job description here was to assist in the putting of bums on seats to avoid a repeat of the Performance Games, which took place in a two-thirds-empty Crystal Palace last week. Hence his appearance at a pre-meeting press conference clad in a Newcastle United shirt with the figures 9.84 on the back.

The digits might need to be amended if the 28-year-old returns next year. "I can certainly improve on that," Bailey said, referring to his world record run in Atlanta. "I didn't have a good start. I can accelerate more from 30 to 70 metres. And I can relax better from 70 to the finish." It could hardly have been a consoling thought for Christie.

Watching Christie from the

edge of the warm-up track was the man from Manchester who succeeded him as Olympic 100m champion in Atlanta and who took his 100m world title in Gothenburg last year. Donovan Bailey, born in Manchester, Jamaica, but a Canadian resident since the age of 11, was preparing to face Christie in the shorter sprint last night.

When last on English soil, to launch the adidas Olympic year range in January, Bailey caused a helpfully high-profile stir by claiming Christie had faked injury while losing in Gothenburg. He arrived on Tyneside in more sanguine mood, bearing an olive branch for the British veteran.

"I felt for him in Atlanta," he said, referring to Christie's false-starting major championship finale. "Linford has been a great champion, very consistent since 1986. I think if he wanted to run a couple of top-class races next year he would still be a fearsome competitor. He would certainly be welcomed back to mix it with the boys."

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Watching Christie from the

Baseman is double trouble for Brewer



Ray Durham, of the Chicago White Sox, converts a double play on Milwaukee Brewers' Jeff Cirillo on a Dave Nilsson hit in the eighth inning in Milwaukee. The Brewers beat the Sox 8-7

Photograph: Dan Curmer/AP

Mean McCague turns the screw on Somerset

Cricket

DAVID LLEWELLYN
reports from Canterbury
Kent 616-7 and 92-2dec
Somerset 339-9 dec and 257
Kent won by 62 runs

Martin McCague at his malvolent best is one of the meanest sights in cricket, as Somerset discovered yesterday. A devastating spell of 4 for 14 in 33 balls sent Kent into second place in the championship and may well have gone some way to solving the county's captaincy conundrum.

Their third stand-in captain of the season is Trevor Ward, who has now led them to victory in each of his last two championship games in charge. While there are calls for Matthew Fleming to be appointed, Ward, as senior pro, is demonstrating his leadership capabilities where it matters, out in the field.

With McCague charging in at one end and Dean Headley knocking them over at the other, Ward looks to be on to a winner. Kent are proving something of an irresistible force in the title race and sit two points behind the new leaders, Derbyshire.

The finish was set up by Ward's willingness to let Somersets a tempting, and some felt unnecessarily generous, target of 320 in 88 overs, but the match swung this way and that throughout the final afternoon.

The Somerset opener, Mark Lathwell, has had a patchy season before yesterday's effort and fully deserved his hundred. Unfortunately, having sustained the momentum right up to ten he made a late decision to leave alone a ball from Headley which clipped the top corner of his off stump.

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